THE LOVE CHILD

by

B. P. MOORE

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By the same author

SARAH AND HER DAUGHTER

THE LOVE CHILD

By

BERTHA PEARL MOORE



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THE LOVE CHILD

BOOK ONE

I

OF late Annie had begun to ask questions—not the questions that talkative children ask their elders, but the questions that children in their teens begin to ask themselves.

Had God made a world for people to be happy in, a world in which things should be right? And if He had, then why had so much gone wrong? Why weren't people happy? Why couldn't she be happy? Why wasn't her father happy? And her mother—why was she always so irritating? Why? Why?

She looked about her at the squalid surroundings in which she lived, had lived in fact almost all the fourteen years of her life. A broken table, four broken chairs, a broken ice-box, a clock, the inevitable calendar fixed by a rusty pin to the wall—the shabbily bare surroundings of the great mass of New York's East Side families.

"Why?" she wondered. Her head ached and she drew her hand slowly over her forehead. Her eyes fell upon pretty five-year-old Nina scrambling to her feet from where she had been sitting on the bare wooden floor. A smile transfigured Annie's face when she heard the plaintive child voice call: "Ann, what's this?" There was abounding love in her eyes as she watched the little girl skip across the room, holding in her hand a picture post-card. She received Nina tenderly into her lap.

"This," answered Annie, earnestly examining the card, " is an angel."

How dear to Annie's ears sounded the familiar squeak of surprise. How dear the wide innocence in the large hazel eyes. "A angel!" You would have thought this was the first time the golden-haired, winged creature against a sky-blue background, with pink roses underfoot, had been described to her as an angel. Nina had a way, delightful to Annie, of asking the same question over and over again, receiving the same answer each time as though it were new to her.

"Yes, an angel," repeated Annie, kissing the baby. If Annie still retained anything of her childhood's faith in angels, it was because of Nina.

And then came a new question, which brought a serious expression into Annie's face: "What's a angel?"

Annie could not answer this so readily. At

last she said, "Good little children who have died and gone to heaven," and she watched the subtle expression that played over the little girl's face, aware that Nina, in turn, was studying her own. Annie was lovely looking. Her eyes were a limpid blue, with long dark lashes and finely arched eyebrows. She had rather protruding cheek bones, full lips and a fine square chin.

"Who made a angel, Ann?" asked Nina.

"God—I—I—guess . . ." faltered Annie, reluctantly. The strange thoughts that had come to her of late on the place of God in a badly disordered world annoyed her when they stood so stubbornly in the way of her ready answers to Nina's questions.

"What else did God make?"

Still more reluctantly, though more resolutely, Annie answered, "Everything, dear."

"Ev'ything?" cried Nina. A ruffle of incredulity darkened her forehead. She seemed to stiffen against the answer as something preposterous. And then she shot one of those startling questions of the five-year-olds that have struck awe in the hearts of wiser people than Annie: "If God made ev'ything den who made God?"

There stumbled through Annie's mind a dim recollection of something she had heard—that children who are too brilliant die young. Vague terror seized her. She laughed a frightened laugh and strained Nina to her. Kissing her over and

over again, she cried in a smothered voice: "You're so smart, it's awful." She gritted her teeth in a veritable agony of feeling. "Annie loves her better'n anything or anybody or—or anything." A hot nervous flush suffused Annie's face. The emotion made her head ache more, but she smiled while Nina laughed the amused, pleased laugh of a child.

The laugh roused their father who, dull with recent drinking, sat dozing in the same room, the room-of-all-affairs, his bulky body overflowing the chair. He opened his melancholy brown eyes, rolled them sleepily, opened them wider and stared vacantly.

Both children sat stone-still watching him.

Twice Yekel raised and let fall his right foot, in which he frequently had rheumatic pain. Queer, thought Annie, that he had not taken off his shoes before going to sleep, as was his habit. She watched Yekel raise his hand to his head and stroke his rough brown hair, then drop his hand limply back upon his knee. From his complete relaxation it was apparent that he was again asleep. Annie whispered to Nina, "Come, let's go into the bedroom so he can't hear us talk and maybe wake up again."

"Aw right," Nina whispered back.

Annie took Nina's hand and they tiptoed across the room. When they reached the door of the bedroom, Annie stopped suddenly and whispered,

"Wait a minute, Nina." She let go the girl's hand, tiptoed back to where her father sat, and sank lightly down on her knees. With deft fingers she unlaced the shoes and in a twinkling had them off his feet. Yekel did not stir.

The next moment Annie and Nina had taken refuge in the bedroom.

II

Mira and Gussie and Libbie emerged from a tenement on Delancey Street where they had paid their weekly visit to an ailing relative. As usual, they stood a moment silently on the curb, while Mira made up her mind on the momentous question of what to have for supper.

"Hurry, mama," urged Gussie, "it's cold."

"I think I'll have milk supper," said Mira.

Said Gussie, "I like it very much," with an intonation that denoted both apathy and courtesy. Gussie was a daughter of the old school; she was the first-born of the Cohen children; had been brought to America a young girl, and was now a grown woman of twenty-two.

"Ah, yeh, ma, milk supper; I like it too," coaxed the younger Libbie, eagerly peering up into the faces of her elders, smacking her lips in anticipation of the treat.

"Then you go get the bread and butter," said Mira.

"Sure," Libbie acquiesced readily, hopping from one foot to the other because of the cold.

"And you," said Mira, addressing Gussie, "go straight home. I'm so worried about Annie. She was complaining she had a headache, and she really looked green and yellow in the face. And then Nina—when I leave her alone I keep thinking every minute: Now she scalded herself; now she burned herself; now she fell out of the . . ."

"Oh, ma," interrupted Gussie gently, a troubled look in her eyes, "you worry so much. Nothing like that ever happens."

With a fatalistic nod of the head Mira answered, "I wouldn't worry if I had a husband like other women and you children had a father like other children. But *he* would be drunk no matter what, and if the roof were falling on his child's head he couldn't tell her to look out. No, his tongue wouldn't work." But there was no bitterness in her tone.

Gussie sighed sympathetically. That satisfied Mira. Sympathy automatically checked her complaints. "You go straight home, Gussie," she switched back again, "and you, Libbie, go get the bread and butter."

"All right," said Gussie and turned and left.

Libbie held out her hand for money.

"Get a rye bread," said Mira.

"Ah no, a pumpernickel."

"Aw right, a pumpernickel," chopped Mira in reply, depositing the coin with unwonted energy in Libbie's hand. Mira hated counter suggestions.

Libbie inhaled deeply, bent to pull up her stocking, and then skipped away.

"A loaferke," thought Mira, but not without love in her heart. She adjusted the shawl over her bony shoulders, turned and headed for Hester Street, the Home for Disabled and Diseased Merchandise, thinking, "Boiled potatoes—sour cream —herring—that will be a nice supper."

Once Mira's mind was made up as to just what she had to buy, she began fairly to whip her way through the streets, headed straight for Kupperman's cellar.

A preposterous place for business was Kupperman's cellar, wrapped in midnight, the walls mouldy and bare, the floor by the doorway occupied by a few barrels, the inner regions stretching away like the corridors of the lost. The barrels held herrings whose tragedy lay in more than the fact that once they had known the freedom of the sea. They were discriminated against according to their class! First class herrings lay packed nicely in new-looking barrels; second class in a barrel that reeked with age, and third class ones lay about on boards here, there, everywhere. Mr. Kupperman was the Power that decided in which class a herring

should belong, and in this he was guided by the herring's sex and smell. Herrings male and female of an alien odor were consigned to third class automatically. Male herrings smelling their own proper smell, belonged to the second class. Female herrings, committing no indiscretions of odor were, because of their especial tenderness, elevated to the first class.

"Good morning, Mr. Kupperman. How is a good Jew?" flattered Mira, her eyes narrowing in the half-light. Mr. Kupperman, Hester Street's herring-dealer-in-chief of those days, was a much abbreviated gentleman, humped up on a box in the rear of his shop, his greenish-black coat spotted with herring brine and dotted with herring scales. He lifted small brown eyes out of a wilderness of brown, rough fuzz.

"Ah, nu, a good Sabbath to you," he echoed, friendly, rising and coming briskly forward. "I haven't seen you for years with yearlets. Thought you forgot me and the herrings."

"Forget? The taste of the last is still in my mouth." By flattery, Mira was paving the way to a bargain. Then, hesitatingly, "Nu, what kind of herrings have you got to-day?" she asked. She cleared her throat, threw up her chest.

The herring chief clicked his tongue, rolled his eyes, wagged his head, waved his hands: "Herring—it's a pleasure!" he said, and led the way to the goods whereof he spoke.

"Not these!" cried Mira. She had a fleeting suspicion that Mr. Kupperman was leading her to the third class.

"God forbid!" sang he, and spat out, "I wouldn't sell you these, not to you, not I. Ut, these are the ones I mean." And, love-light in his eyes, he held a female herring up by the tail. "Smell it—smell," he said, swinging the fish under Mira's nose. "It will melt in your mouth, soft like butter, no better herring in the world, I should be so well." His free hand patted his meager breast.

Mira, head well back, tongue teasing at her lower lip, regarded the herring and remained non-committal, for it would not do to encourage a rise in price. "It's an especially fine herring," she thought. Then, eyes averted, with no inkling of her thought in her tone, "How much is it?" she said.

A moment's pause. Mr. Kupperman looked as though he were figuring a sum in higher mathematics. Here was a dealer whose quotations depended solely on the haggling qualities of the purchaser. "Six cents," he snapped at last. It was a sum double what he expected to get for it.

"Six cents?" Mira's voice rose and swelled richly. You would have thought she had been called upon to pay for it with her life.

The herring chief jerked his shoulders a little nervously, ducked his head, stroked his beard.

"So how much then do you want to pay?" he asked in a low voice.

"Two cents and not a hairlet more," snapped Mira, tense, mistress of herself, drawing her shawl closer about her bony shoulders.

With what derision Mr. Kupperman barked: "Haw! Go! Two cents! It will pay me better to throw it to the cats. Then at least I will be doing charity." With a sudden lift of the chest he added, "If you want the cheapest, why don't you pick out the worst? If you want the best, why do you offer the price of the cheapest? Go—go elsewhere. There are plenty of other herring shops."

A moment's pause.

From Mira: "Every time I come, you tell me the same thing. And if I would want to go without buying I swear you would run after me and give it to me for half."

Mr. Kupperman glanced up, wrinkled his forehead. They stood looking into each other's eyes, measuring up opposing forces. At last Mr. Kupperman stooped, picked up a piece of paper from the floor, wrapped the herring, held it out to Mira.

"Take it for three cents," he said, and their eyes met in a cool glance.

Silently Mira groped in her purse for a nickel. Silently Mr. Kupperman gave her the change. Silently Mira placed the herring in the crook of

her arm. Silently she began to ascend the flight of stairs leading up to the street.

"*Gate gesunter hade,*" called the herring chief gently.

"*Hut zich mir a guten zeit zich,*" answered Mira facetiously.

In the stronger light of the street, Mira stood blinking.

Upon her ears thundered "Penneness! Hepples! Ornitzes!" (Bananas, apples, oranges.) "Five a penny, missus, five a penny." . . . "Fish! Fish! Lebedicka fish! Tzeep!" (Fish, fish, live fish, cheap.) . . . "Twelve cents a pound, women, twelve cents a pound, women." At last Mira opened wide her eyes.

Behold, against a background of dilapidated houses with window displays of silks, satins, woolens, a ragged line of pushcarts overflowing with sickly foodstuffs, from pickles to bread; wearing apparel, from shoes to coats; household utensils, from graters to stoves. Hawkers of both sexes, sallow and ruddy, sensitive and coarse, clean and filthy, huddled in fur-lined shabbiness or layers of cloaks and shawls, stand behind the pushcarts, rubbing hands, slapping thighs. Behold Hester Street!

"I'll get me the potatoes next," decided Mira, and whipped down left to Mrs. Rasha's pushcart. Mrs. Rasha was a dumpy little person, brisk, bold, and the bread-winner of a family of five.

"Aw, such a cold, a bitter cold." Mrs. Rasha's lips were so frozen she could scarcely talk.

"God will give the miracle that the potatoes will be frozen," ventured Mira. Here, too, she was paving the way to a bargain, but this time by disparaging in advance the quality of the goods.

"They are not frozen, they are not frozen," came the swift reply as Mrs. Rasha whisked a muddy covering from the face of her specialty.

They were not frozen. Mira had not the courage to outrage fact.

"Five pounds is how much to-day?" she ventured feebly.

"Ten cents."

"Nine."

"Ten." Mrs. Rasha threw the muddy cover swiftly back over her goods as if she had no intention of selling after such an affront.

"What's the matter all of a sudden ten cents? The day before yesterday it was only nine."

Mrs. Rasha turned upon Mira with something of the swiftness of wind. "The day before yesterday was a day and to-day is another day," she flung out, singsong.

"To God they are all alike," said Mira.

"But not to potatoes," snapped Mrs Rasha.

"I got up in the ice coldness of three o'clock in the morning and I rode to the market, stiff inside and out. I stood on my feet in line till my eyes came out of my head. And *I* paid eight

and a half cents. Maybe I ought to sell it to you for nine and give you humble thanks yet?''

''Don't stand there twisting my head. Nine cents and plenty it is. Now are you going to give it to me? I can't stand waiting all day. I'll go elsewhere if it suits you better.'' Mira had stiffened under her shawl.

''Go and be well,'' spoke Mrs. Rasha.

''All right, I will.'' And Mira turned to go. She walked a pace. Mrs. Rasha suffered a change of heart.

''Nu, nu, come here already,'' she called meekly and, as Mira returned, Mrs. Rasha said what she always said on such occasions: ''May God give me and my children health and happiness, I am losing money on you. But who wants to insult a steady customer?'' This last with a rise of the eyebrows and a sidewise jerk of the head. Quickly weighing five pounds of potatoes, she handed the bag to Mira with a sigh, holding out her hand for coin.

This chapter ended, another began. ''How is your man to-day?'' Mrs. Rasha asked in a personal tone, while she dug in her pocket for Mira's change.

''My man? He *is*,'' responded Mira.

''Keeps sober?''

''Sober as a bug in kerosene.''

A wistful smile.

''The children?'' asked Mrs. Rasha.

"Annie I left sick. I must really hurry home."

"What fails her?"

"Headache," said Mira.

"Not so terrible. Nu, good-by."

Mira's good-by was not so readily forthcoming. She had yet to bob the bag of potatoes up and down and to ask if Mrs. Rasha were sure she had given the proper weight.

"Of course it's right. What do you think?"

There was a moment of suspended judgment that broke like a bubble with the puckering of Mira's forehead, followed by a nod as if to say she supposed it was all right. In reality she thought the bag weighed more.

"*Ah guten by,*" she said at last and left, feeling satisfaction like the rise of dawn in her heart for the bargains she had made.

III

When Gussie came home, Yekel was still asleep in the chair, and when she peeped into the bedroom she discovered Annie, with Nina in her arms, asleep on the bed. Annie's headache had finally drawn her to the bed to lie down, and as Nina was seldom averse to doing anything Annie did, she too had scrambled on to the bed and had also fallen asleep.

Gussie drew a chair over to the window and, sitting down, looked out on the street. When,

a little later, she saw Libbie arriving with the bread and butter in her arms, she rose and went to the door and, holding it slightly ajar, stood looking into the hall. As soon as Libbie came into sight on the stairs, she whispered, "Don't make a noise. They're asleep."

Libbie came into the house softly, and softly placed the parcels on the table. Scarcely had she done this when Mira opened the door in her sharp, abrupt way. Before she had a full foot set in the room she had already cried, "Fui, the cold kills me. My hands are frozen," and, letting the door close with a bang, she asked, "how is Annie? Where is Nina?"

With a deep snort, Yekel awoke. Mira glanced toward him and caught his blood-shot eyes. She looked away with an expression of disgust she didn't feel and exchanged a commiserating glance with Gussie. Then she moved over to the table where she noisily deposited her purchases, Gussie helping her.

"A disease upon bummers," Mira muttered. She never cursed her own specifically, but always indirectly. "All *day* he was sleeping off his souse." Though she didn't have a feeling in the world on the subject by now, so used to Yekel's waywardness was she, it was second nature for her to complain. She loved the aura of martyrdom it created around her.

"S-sh!" said Gussie conciliatingly.

Mira was tired, and somehow Gussie's conciliatory manner, this time, made her temper flare: "Don't 'sh-sh' me!" she cried. "You hear? One doesn't 'sh-sh' one's mother." Her voice rose shrilly.

Gussie dropped her eyes.

Mira's loud voice awakened Nina and Annie. Annie sat bolt upright, full wakefulness coming to her in a moment. She strained to hear whom her mother was admonishing. Was it her father?

"Mama's mad!" whispered little Nina in an awed voice, snuggling against Annie.

In the silence that followed Annie could hear her mother whipping about the room-of-all-affairs. All her movements were so sharp and noisy. A feeling of faint disgust involuntarily coursed through Annie's being. Her mother was a fault-finder, a busy-body, a haggler. Then she became aware of stinging pains in her head and chills shooting up and down her spine. With a sigh she lay down again. So did Nina.

They heard their father's heavy tread. He stopped where the table must be. They heard the flow of water. He must be pouring himself a glass of water from the pitcher . . . Crash! The pitcher broken!

Their mother's sharp, shrill voice: "Look at him, he hasn't slept off his souse yet. A perfectly good pitcher broken! Wooden hands he has!"

Annie and Nina both jumped off the bed.

"What's a madder with mama anyway, I wonder?" wailed Nina. "She's all mad!" And then she added with knowing disgust, "Aw, it's coun'a papa, betcha 'cause he's always drunk. I hate papa; he's a bum."

"Sh! You mustn't say that," said Annie. This was the one point on which they did not always agree, these two. How could Annie always take papa's part, all the time? Nina frequently wondered.

Annie took Nina's hand and walked with her to the room-of-all-affairs, where Mira was already stooping over the broken pieces of pitcher to get them out of the way. Lifting a piece carelessly, she cut her finger. She jerked the bleeding finger up to her mouth and shot, a straight, lean, red headed, angry thing, up from the floor.

"For him I must cut myself," she cried in misery. "God mine, cut your *own* finger, you——"

Just then she caught Annie's wounded glance. "It's not papa's fault if you cut your finger," said Annie softly and, dropping Nina's hand, proceeded to finish the task her mother had begun.

Out of the drunken fog that still weighed down upon Yekel, he recognized his daughter's sympathetic protectiveness, and the heart of him recoiled, ashamed. He felt himself unworthy. He was a drunkard and deserved Mira's censuring. Sadness, remorse, a sense of futility, like aged things, dragged through his soul.

Mira, in whom a flame of temper never had more than a moment's life, immediately became silent and proceeded to set the table. The wound on her finger was so superficial it did not need any real attention. Because of the pallor of Annie's face, she watched her with concern as she went back and forth from the table to a far end of the room where the garbage can stood, to deposit the broken pieces of crockery.

"How is your headache?" Mira asked at last.

Annie did not answer.

"How is your headache?" repeated the mother.

From the corner of the room where he had seated himself again, Yekel strained to hear the reply.

"It's bad," answered Annie.

A frightened look came into the mother's eyes. Headaches frightened Mira. Of diseases beginning with headaches several of her children had died. A tragic look came into the father's eyes; Annie was his all. A silence of suspense followed. Then, "Don't walk any more," said Mira. "Seat yourself."

Nina advanced into the room. "Come play wid me," she pleaded, looking up at her sister.

Annie sat down with her on the floor. Nina burst into sudden exultant song: "I teast it, I tast it, I sawn a yellow basket . . ."

"No singing, Nina," said Annie, holding her hand up to her head.

"Play a game den," pleaded Nina.

Said Annie, "Let's play 'My mother said—' "

They clapped opposite hands.

"My mother *said*

"I should *not*

"Play with the *gypsies*

"*In the woods;*

"If I *would*

"She would *say*——"

Yekel watched Annie with brooding concern in his eyes, and his concern heightened when Annie cried, breaking the game off abruptly:

"Oh, I'm going to lie down again. My head is splitting and I feel awful." She rose.

Said Gussie, "Aren't you going to eat supper?"

"Eat a little," said the mother.

"I can't," said Annie.

"Then," said Mira decisively, "you must take castor oil. If you can't eat, it's not a headache alone, it's an internal sickness you've got, and an internal sickness castor oil cures."

Annie thought with annoyance, "Always she knows everything." Aloud, she said, "I won't take castor oil. I hate it!" and went out of the room, her father's eyes lovingly following her.

Mira happened to catch Yekel's glance and in it she thought she read approval of Annie's refusal. Hot resentment sent a flush to her face.

"Everybody go to the table," she snapped.

Gussie, Libbie and Nina obeyed immediately. Yekel put on his shoes in his slow way, never even remembering he had not taken them off, and then moved slowly toward his place and sat down.

In complete silence supper went forward. When the meal was almost finished, there came a moan from the bedroom. The mother and father exchanged swift, anxious glances. There came another moan.

Each saw the other turn pale and both followed an impulse to go and look in on Annie. Mira was first to reach the girl's side. "What is the matter?" she asked, bending over her.

Annie moaned a third time, but in her sleep, as both Yekel and Mira perceived at once. What a relief! The massive wrinkles on Yekel's face cleared up; patches of red took the place of Mira's pallor. She was first to turn and leave. Yekel lingered a moment, then left too, one of his garters trailing after him on the floor.

IV

It was not merely that Annie had refused what was for her own good that worried Mira. Somebody had refused to do her bidding—that hurt her too. Mira was one of those persons who decide the fates of others as naturally as

they breathe, and cannot stand being crossed in their decisions. She was of those who are entirely confident of themselves, tremendously efficient, and actually capable of offering good advice more often than not. If Mira said that Annie should take castor oil, Annie should, without any opposition, have taken it. So Mira kept thinking as she went about clearing the dishes from the table, washing them, straightening up the room. And the same thought was with her all through the evening until at bedtime she had firmly decided that Annie should be forced to obey.

The Cohens lived in three rooms linked railway fashion. There was the room-of-all-affairs, that room of the East Side flats in which occurs everything, from day-dreaming to death, whose two small windows looked out upon Division Street, with its clatter of elevated trains, its dirt, dust and smells. A procession of three chairs, set against one of these windows, comprised Annie's sleeping quarters. On a cot set nightly in the middle of the room, Gussie slept.

Adjoining the room-of-all-affairs was the bedroom, containing the one real bed in the house. This room was shared by husband and wife.

Upon a mattress on the floor of the one other room, little Nina and Libbie slept. This was the parlor, holding a few pieces of worn maple furniture and a shabby green plush lounge, its single

window close up against the red brick cheek of another tenement.

As a rule, Gussie and Annie attended to the making up of the sleeping places at night. This night the task fell to Mira and Gussie. Mira, in the haste with which she always did everything, happened to strike her cut finger against Gussie's cot as she was setting it up, and the sharp pain of it brought fury from her tongue against her husband who sat apparently so complacent in his corner, as if he had not the slightest concern with what was going on about him.

"Why are you sitting there so like a king? Can't you stand straight enough on your legs to help too?" she hurled at him.

So suddenly addressed, Yekel was startled. His wife's words not being in the least clear to him, he frowned and turned his back. This made Mira really angry.

"A father!" she flung at him bitterly. "His child is sick and he can't even make her do what her mother says is good for her. A father like a lump of——"

Yekel, keeping his eyes averted, slowly rose from his chair and clumped out of the room, a garter still trailing after him on the floor.

Mira was reduced to silence until Annie, awakened by Gussie, came, looking pale and with heavy puffs of impending illness under her eyes, to take her place on the three chairs.

"Annie," began her mother in a cajoling tone, her anger all gone, "take castor oil as I say and it will make you better."

Only half awake, all her senses dull, Annie felt disinclined to make any answer.

"Can't you answer ma?" snapped Libbie.

"Really, one would think mama is younger than you," observed the filial Gussie, "the way you disobey."

"Oh, please leave me alone," Annie cried out despairingly.

Yekel, hearing, felt his heart bound. Rather hastily, for him, he rose from the plush lounge in the parlor where he had seated himself, and went back to the room-of-all-affairs on the pretense of having left something behind. He kept slowly stirring about the room, something like a barge on water, shifting his eyes from one member of the family to the other, while they kept insisting upon Annie's obedience and Annie continued to hold out against them. At last Mira turned to Yekel. "Where are you, father? Can't you make her obey?"

Yekel paid no attention to her, and hated himself for it. He felt he ought to answer something, realizing full well how exasperating his silence must be. He sat down; he leaned forward, puffing, and with his heavy red hands began to unlace his shoes.

Annie got in between the covers of her bed

and, wearily turning her eyes toward the window relaxed and lay very still.

No one said a word.

Gussie, undressing rapidly, got into her cot.

Nina went over to Annie and whispered, "Good night, Ann, you keep yourself we-el," in that sweet, plaintive child voice of hers that carried this time a troubled note.

"Good night, Nina," answered Annie.

Nina and Libbie went off to bed. At last Yekel rose and, shoes in hand, headed for the bedroom.

Mira was in the act of taking off her shirtwaist. She stopped short and, watching him through tiny slits of blue eyes as he went out, thought, "If the house burned down, if the United States ran away, he would be dumb. A dumb man he is."

V

The Cohens had been living in America ten years, having migrated from Russia. They had come six in number. The children were Gussie, then twelve, Benjamin, eleven, a boy who stuttered and later ran away from home and never was heard from again, Annie, four, and Libbie, one. The five children who bridged the gap between Benjamin and Annie had all died. Nina was born in America.

Because it was necessary for the family to

think of a livelihood immediately, Gussie never went to school in America. She spoke English brokenly when she spoke it at all, preferring the Yiddish, like her mother. She had been little affected by American influences. In her appearance and in her sentiments she was her mother all over again. But while her mother was swift, efficient, sharp-tongued, Gussie was slow, phlegmatic and gentle-spoken. Also, her hair instead of being straight, was wavy, and she was of a full figure.

Libbie shared the qualities of both her sister and her mother. She was sharp-tongued or gentle-spoken in turn. She could be swift and efficient, or phlegmatic and inefficient. She was a nervous little girl, and might have been spiritually restless if there had not been just enough of her mother's coarseness in her to save her. As it was, she blinked her eyes too frequently, kept her hands roving unnecessarily, ran where it would have been equally well to walk, but not from inner stress of any sort. Physically, she was a diminutive reproduction of her mother—the same straight red hair, the same slits of blue eyes, the same thin, pale lips, the same pale skin, and the same bodily spareness.

Nina, however, was a blending of the qualities of both her father and her mother, and Annie, not knowing why she did so, clung to Nina with an affection that was almost passion.

As for Annie, she was Yekel's child alone.

There was in consequence a division of sympathies in the family group. There was never a time when Annie's desire to defend their father failed her, and in this Nina was frequently with her. There was never a time when Gussie and Libbie failed to feel that their mother had right on her side.

When in the middle of the night following her disobedience of her mother, Annie sat up in bed and cried out, "Oh, my, I feel so sick!" the first thought that darted into the minds of the suddenly awakened Gussie and Libbie was, "See! If she had taken the castor oil as mama said——"

Libbie, half naked, jumped out of her bed and stumbled into the room-of-all-affairs; at the same time Gussie, in a discarded summer dress for a nightgown, leaped from her cot. Next came Yekel, wearing an old long coat, and Mira in a worn shirt waist and a checked apron sewed up the back; they gathered around Annie in a concerned group.

"Where does it hurt you?" cried Mira shrilly.

"In my stomach," wailed Annie, "and in my head."

Mira felt her daughter's forehead, and then her neck. How hot they were! "I should have *forced* her to take the castor oil," she lamented. "My God, she has a fever!" Mira was frightened of fevers; it was fevers that had finally

attacked those children of hers who had died. Poor Mira! No wonder she wrung her hands and, incidentally, threw her husband a bitter look. . . . And then she began to busy herself, going from one thing to another so fast that one could scarcely tell what she was doing for the swiftness of her movements.

"Mama was right," said Gussie.

"You betcha mama was right," echoed Libbie.

Annie raised troubled eyes.

To one side stood Yekel, his heavy cheeks sagging, his lower lip drooping, his melancholy brown eyes dumbly staring. He wanted to come forward and tell Annie he would protect her against whatever it was that assailed her, but the habit of long years of silence was too fixed in him. Standing idly to one side, his heavy lips slightly parted, his thick nostrils dilated, he had the appearance of a troubled, dumb animal.

At last Mira reappeared by the side of the chair-bed. In her hand was a glass in which swam heavily the castor oil. At sight of it Annie fairly shrieked, "Oh, not that—give me anything—there are lots of other things—not that! I can't take that!" Her voice trailed off in a wail.

Yekel tightened his fists. He wanted to go over and fling the wretched stuff from his wife's hands and demand that she cease her ignorant activity, but he couldn't.

"Take it!" said Gussie.

"You better take it," chimed in Libbie.

Into Mira's anxious mother breast leaped a resolution. She bent and pinched Annie's nose. Annie was compelled to open her mouth, but she flung out her hands in wild resistance.

Gussie grabbed Annie's hands in hers. Annie flung her head about. Mira ordered Libbie to hold Annie's head still.

Here Yekel's face underwent a curious spasm, and the words burst from him as if in spite of his desperate effort to keep them in:

"You will not do this," he said. He drew to Annie's side, barring Mira. Gussie had to relax her hold on Annie's hands.

Husband and wife regarded each other silently, appraisingly. Through Mira's breast coursed hatred and love, like two streams. For the fact that her husband was spurred to speech because of this particular child, Mira hated Yekel; but for the fact that he was opposing his masculinity to her, was mastering her, she oddly loved him. In reality, Mira loved Yekel. He had been her answer to the woman's call for an opposite; no man could have been more so than Yekel. Commonplace and prosaic herself, Mira had a vivid appreciation of the uncommonplace in her mate. Something told Mira there was depth to her husband. What it was that told Mira this she could not have said, for certainly what was apparent

in him—his drunkenness, his apathy, his detachment from the family,—did not reflect depth as Mira could see it. Perhaps it was Yekel's unfailing silence which, as if it were a refusal to take cognizance of that world about him, smaller than his own, had taught Mira to regard Yekel as a man apart from other men. At any rate, Mira knew a man lived somewhere inside her husband. Something told her that had Yekel chosen he could have risen high above other men. He might even have been a musician as great as the world had ever known, for did he not play the fiddle "fine" by ear, with never any training? Oh, secretly Mira was proud of her husband. Though outwardly, when she was moved to self-pity, she complained of his shortcomings, at heart she rather took pride in Yekel's unused potentialities.

The fact was that whatever Mira's spoken complaints, her real grievance was that she had never reached Yekel. He had married her, and that was all. Himself, he belonged elsewhere. She knew this, and resented it. Her nature required that she should be wholly included everywhere and that she should in turn wholly own. She had never owned all of Yekel. There was a man in him she had never reached, for all that she had borne him child after child. And she wanted to own all of him, from his lusty bigness and masculinity to that which she only faintly

glimpsed, and that eluded her real understanding like a shadow.

The glass resting limply in her hand, she turned, a subdued creature, to her sick daughter whose close resemblance to Yekel struck her more than ever before. "His very own," she thought, with a pang in the heart. That same elusive something existed in Annie that existed in him. And, remembering Annie's conduct of late, the mother was even more convinced of it. The girl sat around already, at this young age, silent, brooding, thinking. What did she think about? At random, Mira's mind struck the word "fiddelech"; perhaps Annie was thinking about such impractical things as fiddles and playing—those things that would lead her, as they had her father, to ruin. The Mira that speculated thus was the fault-finding Mira, not the admiring one. And as Mira thought thus of Annie, it occurred to her how much better it would have been had Annie taken after *her*. Mira inwardly harbored a belief that this child of hers would yet come to rue her likeness to her father. The next moment, Mira was feeling an objectionable "fanciness" about both her husband and Annie, who had the impudence to close her out. She resented it. They had no right to exclude her; she was wife to one and mother to the other. They had no right to exclude her. Mira turned challenging eyes upon her husband.

"My devoted father," she cried, "have you a better remedy to offer?"

"Yes," said Yekel quietly, "I'll bring a doctor." He breathed heavily from the effort of talking.

Annie, looking up at her father as he stood, a dignified statue before her angry mother, felt a wave of affection for him rise in her heart. "If only he were not a drunkard," she thought, with a degree of sadness scarcely natural in one so young, "how I could love him. And if he only talked—let me know him—was a little like other fathers!" It was upon this reflection about her father that Annie's emotions rose like a tide toward little Nina. Nina, dear, sweet little Nina! . . . A warm peace suffused Annie's being. The need for love in her nature, Nina filled; she could not regret her father's inadequacy for long with Nina to love and to be loved by. But a shadowy feeling of regret, of indefinable incompleteness, somehow clung to Annie.

All this thought and emotion was the matter of a single moment, and immediately she woke to the fact that her pain had left her, that she was feeling very much better.

"I feel much better," she said buoyantly, "I don't need the doctor at all, and no castor oil either. I haven't got any pain any more at all. Go back to bed, everybody."

But her family lingered as if they were not so

ready to trust the alien enemy that had so recently stirred in their midst.

"Really are you better?" asked Gussie.

"All better," answered Annie, reassuringly.

"Better so quick?" yawned Libbie and trailed herself off the scene, remarking as she left, "Fuss. Wakes everybody. Nothing."

Annie, looking after her, was reminded of her mother. She turned her eyes away as if she preferred not to have encountered the reminder. Yekel, catching the expression that flitted over her face, felt himself lifted by it into her soul, which was of *his* world. "My love child," he thought tenderly. He wanted to say something tender, gentle, to her; to take her in his arms. His whole being flowed out to her in love, but he stood, a dumb father, before her. At last he turned abruptly and went back to bed.

Mira, throwing the castor oil away, followed him the next moment and took her place beside him on the bed that sagged in the middle and, with equal spite, bulged on both sides.

Gussie turned off the light in the room-of-all-affairs and, sighing, also went back to bed.

VI

The Cohens were up unusually early the next morning.

It was evident to everyone from the fact that

Annie kept to her chairs and was quiet, that she had not recovered. But no one said anything about it, and no one asked her how she felt.

Yekel, puttering about in the room, watched her anxiously out of a corner of his eye. He noted her pallor, the rings under her eyes; he counted the times she turned from side to side. Once he saw her screw up her face as with pain, and he nearly found the courage to go over and speak to her.

Little Nina toddled in, wearing her rose colored night-dress made over from a waist of Gussie's. She went to her sister and piped, "You sick already?" She always said "already" when she meant "yet." It was a mistake that Annie loved, that always sent adoration for the tiny mite of a sister bounding in her blood.

But this time she did not even notice it. Though she was trying hard to conceal the fact, she was feeling quite ill.

Yekel, noticing her indifference to Nina and realizing what it meant, felt his heart sink.

At last Annie groaned softly.

Yekel was startled into taking a step forward. He met Mira's incisive blue eyes. Abruptly he turned his back.

"Oh my!" Annie at last lost control over herself.

Yekel burst through his reticence. He went to Annie and bent heavily, clumsily over her.

"My childie, what hurts you?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Oh, pa, my side," wailed Annie. There came upon her a feeling that it lay with her father alone to save her from this demon that invaded her being.

Suddenly the pain left her. She looked up into the brooding eyes of her father, into his anxious lined face. "Now it's gone again," she said. "Did you ever!" And she herself looked incredulous.

From little Nina came a gay little laugh. "All gone," she cried merrily, and laughed again.

All happened so fast that only Yekel's anxiety had had time to catch fire.

Mira busied herself preparing breakfast.

Yekel finished dressing.

Gussie dressed, ate, and left for work.

At last, hat in hand, Yekel, coughing a self-conscious cough, shuffled to the door. For fully five minutes he had been fighting the every-day Yekel, that had gained the ascendency, to make room for the father who could go over to Annie and bid her good-by and bid her be better. He had failed. But there was still one victory he might have over himself. He felt that if he were already at the door, and could disappear immediately afterward, he could best do what he had to do.

Reaching the door, he stood fumbling for a mo-

ment with the knob. At last he coughed again, and between coughs he wedged in:

"Mira."

Mira looked up from the table where she sat eating her meager breakfast of bread, the last night's herring, and black coffee. A bombshell could not have startled her more than the sound of her name in her husband's voice. He never addressed her so directly.

"What?" she got out at last.

"On the mantelpiece under a saucer, in the front room, I left a dollar for the doctor. You take Annie to the doctor to-day," he said.

His face underwent a quivering spasm.

He opened the door sharply and was gone.

Mira stared after him as if he had been a stone man who had suddenly developed the faculty of speech. Then her antagonistic self took possession of her. "The bummer," she thought, and hated Yekel.

VII

Emerging from the tenement, Yekel shook himself as if to throw off his anxiety, but the feeling persisted. Annie had never been sick before. He had secretly felt that it was because his blessing was always upon her. At what moment, he brooded, had he been lax? As mentally he reviewed her pallor, heard again her moans, his anxiety became even more tense, until he could

scarcely bear it. "I should have stayed home and brought the doctor myself," he thought, and stopped, half inclined to turn back. A vision of Mira's mocking eyes came to him. "I'm exaggerating," he said to himself, "she has only a stomach ache. Children get stomach aches. She must have eaten a little something that didn't agree with her. It's nothing." But misgiving held his heart prisoner.

His nervous darting glances fell upon a sign, "Wines Whiskey Beer". Electrically a new struggle began for him. "I won't!" he muttered to himself. He started at once to walk again, keeping his eyes down, his lips set. "I won't!" he repeated weakly.

But suddenly, sharply he turned and made for the saloon.

"Give me a whiskey," he flung at the bartender, wiping his face of perspiration. His heart beating, Yekel waited for the bartender to serve him. With a trembling hand he took the glass. He gulped one half of it down, and the rest he drank more slowly. He asked for a second glass, and that one he drank still more slowly. Over the third he lingered even longer. It seemed to bring him his wonted poise. He drank a fourth glass. He banged the empty glass down on the bar, nearly breaking it. He was angry. He had not wanted to drink. Something that was not of himself had forced him to it.

When he had taken up his change, he stood a moment collecting himself, then faced about sharply. He wiped his shaggy brown mustache, straightened stiffly, looked squarely about the room and then shambled to the door.

VIII

Annie lay on her chair-bed, following her busy mother about with wistful eyes. "Will she take me to the doctor soon?" she wondered. "If she knew how sick I feel she would." She closed her eyes wearily. Before her closed eyes she had an image of her mother darting about the room, "like a needle."

"Mama is so much busier when she does things than anybody else," thought Annie fretfully. She opened her eyes. Her mind was a blank for a moment. She sighed and, closing her eyes again, turned her head toward the window. "Mama and papa are so different," she thought. "I wonder why they ever got married. Papa—he's—I don't know, he's different from mama." Her father came and stood before her eyes, then her mother. "They are so different—mama's every-dayish; papa's different. If he spoke, I wonder what he'd say? You never got to wonder about mama; you *know* what she's going to say."

How ceaselessly Mira went from place to place, from task to task. No one else would have done

it in quite that breathless way. A tiny feeling of disgust trickled through Annie's heart. Then she felt guilty for it. Her mother worked so hard—with the children and the house and a drunken husband. How skinny she was—because she worked so hard. Poor ma! A tender feeling invaded Annie's soul. "I do love mama anyhow, too," she thought, and wished she could get up and help her mother with her work.

Nina was sitting on the floor, still as a mouse, her little face screwed up in an expression of intense earnestness, for she was battling with the laces of her shoes.

Mira said, "I'll finish it for you, Nina."

Annie interjected impulsively, "You have enough to do, ma. Nina has lots of time to do it herself."

Mira was always much pleased at any show of consideration. It intensified a feeling of martyrdom she carried with her. Strangely, consideration always spurred her on to seek greater martyrdom. "She is a child," she answered evasively.

"And you're a tired mother," responded Annie.

"So I am," acquiesced Mira.

"Then let Nina do it alone," said Annie. She added with feeling, "Oh, honest, ma, you're good as anything to us. I hope when we grow up we'll be good to you."

"Go, go," deprecated Mira. In reality, she

was delighted. She brushed the table vigorously.

Nina, in whose mind lingered the sound of the word "alone" as it had come from Annie's lips, laughed gaily and repeated aloud, "Alone," as nearly like Annie had said it as she could. Then all at once she discovered she had a hair in her mouth. She began to spit. In a moment she was in a perfect frenzy, spitting wildly until she was free of the hair. She made a comical, adorable picture. Annie's thoughts quickly turned from her mother and centered upon Nina: "Best of everybody in the world I love Nina," she thought, and she felt suddenly very rich in the possession of her. Nina seemed a gift almost too good to be real. Annie began to look forward to the time when Nina would go to school, when she would need help with her lessons. What a joy it would be to help her, to be so much more closely bound up in her dear little life. If only there were a great deal more to do for her! A great love rose powerfully in Annie's breast. "I love her, I love her——" she cried inwardly, while tears gathered in her eyes. "I'll do everything in the world for her when she gets big. She is beautiful—so lovely—darling little Nina——"

Her thoughts were interrupted by a chill that chased up and down her back. She shuddered.

"Are you cold?" asked Mira with concern.

"Yes, ma," Annie replied listlessly.

Mira fetched an old coat to lay across Annie.

At the sight of the greenish-black garment, musty smelling, with rusty strings of cotton where the buttons had once been, a wave of disgust swept over Annie. She was irritated. Her mother knew she hated this coat as a cover. "Oh, mama, not that thing—I don't want that thing to cover me. Take it away." And, despite herself, Annie felt a little of her disgust for the ragged garment transfer itself to her mother. Her father, now, she thought, would never have brought that coat —But she could not go on either with her thought or her feeling, for sheer weariness. The very next moment she began to palpitate with regret for having talked sharply to her mother. "Anyway, I feel warmer," she said, looking up with a smile at Mira. The chill had in fact been succeeded by a flush of heat.

Mira noticed that Annie's eyes were quite clear. She looked much better than she had the day before, she thought, and all concern somehow dropped away from Mira. A dozen uses to which she could put the dollar Yekel had left for the doctor danced like little figures in her mind. An inspiration seized her, tightened its hold, held her in an iron grip.

"My daughter, I think," she began, singsong, after a while, "the best thing is to take you to the dispensary. Doctors in the private are after profit. He'll say you have a sickness even if you haven't, to make me come back, and get the

money. In the dispensary they want to get rid of you. They make you get well quick, quick. I'll take you to the dispensary, really. It's better. Fui, on doctors! They're money-makers, bloodsuckers.'' While of this Mira was really quite convinced, her eagerness to save the dollar heightened her conviction.

There was something in the very ring of the word dispensary that alarmed Annie. She knew it was a place akin to a hospital where, her mother herself had said, doctors, to gain skill, practiced, without conscience, upon the poor. How could her mother think of taking her to such a place?

As if her mother read her thoughts, she said:

''In a dispensary you don't need to stay. I take you back with me. It's not like a hospital. How can they do anything bad to you when I am all the time looking?''

But Annie was not convinced. She did not want to go to the dispensary. Her father had left a dollar to pay for a visit to a doctor; her mother ought to take her to one. She wanted to say so but she knew her mother would cling to her resolution all the more were she crossed in it. Annie sighed acquiescence, but in her heart stirred involuntary bitterness. What followed a few moments later made Annie's blood surge hotly in her temples, and brought words of flame to her tongue despite her efforts at self-control.

Mira was dressing Nina. Nina never would

let her underwear be put on before she had on her shoes and stockings. It somehow did not seem correct to her to dress in any other way. In the middle of Mira's efforts to get the too small shirt over Nina's head, Nina sucked her stomach into a little cavern beneath her ribs and became immensely interested in her naval, as she often did. She put again to her mother the question she had asked many times before. "Oh, ma, what's this?"

"It's a corkscrew that goes into your stomach."

"Tomac?" she asked, that incredulous squeak in her voice, cocking her small head to one side and thus interrupting Mira's work. Mira somehow lost her patience and impulsively gave the little girl a whack on the cheek.

"Keep your head straight," she cried, crimson suffusing her face. "When your mother dresses you, don't turn yourself and throw yourself around."

Nina was so shocked by the suddenness of the whack, that the breath left her tiny body. For a moment she stood as though turned to stone, and then a weird cry of pain shot out from her.

Annie sat bolt upright. Her eyes blazed indignation. Her head reeled.

"What did you hit her for?" she cried at her mother. "She only asked you a question." Turning to Nina, she stretched out her arms, "Come to me, Nina darling." Her voice broke from sympathetic feeling for the child.

Nina toddled over to Annie, convulsive sobs racking her. She sank, an offended little person, across Annie.

"No, no darling, sweetheart, pet. No. It's a corkscrew that goes down into your tummy," Annie cooed, "a corkscrew."

Mira came to reclaim Nina. "She has to do what a mama says," she cried, but without anger.

Annie held on to Nina.

"What do you want her to do?" she flung up into her mother's face. "You hit her for nothing; you hadn't said she should do something she didn't want to do."

"She's got to get dressed." All of Mira's manner bespoke contrition. She added gently: "And you too; in an hour I got to take you to the dispensary."

The cloud upon Nina's horizon lifted. The mere mention of the dispensary was enough to lift it, to take her away from the wicked world into which she had been pitched for a moment,

"Gonne take Annie by the spencer?" she wailed.

"Yes," said the mother tenderly, "and you wasted my time by turning your head. That's why I slapped you."

"Aw right," said Nina, "then I ain't mad on you."

A laugh broke from Mira. She stood a fraction of a second beaming love upon the child,

and then her mother soul burst into music. She swooped down upon Nina, buried her in her lean arms, "My crown! My heart! My life! My child!" she fairly groaned and crushed the baby to her.

Then, suddenly, it was as if all the light had been turned off in Annie's being. For a swift moment all went dark before her eyes. She could not bear to feel that Nina was also shared by her mother. She wanted Nina to belong to her alone. She needed her. Her whole being seemed ablaze with the need. The next moment she was herself again, wishing passionately that it were time to go to the dispensary. She was so sick!

IX

Half an hour later Annie, all bundled up, Mira, all bundled up, for it was a cold, blustery day, and Nina tucked from head to foot in a red shawl, scarlet as blood, were trudging down the rickety tenement stairs.

"You," Mira was saying to Nina, "will stay on the street and play with the other children till we come back."

"Ef—ef—" responded Nina, "you gimme a penny for mixed taffy like you said."

"Yes," said Mira, "that I'll do. You are a good little girl and I'll do that for you."

Peace had been re-established by this time.

On the street Nina stood, an eager little body

on tiptoe, her hand raised, palm up, in anticipation of the coin for which Mira was rummaging in her pocket. At last it appeared. Nina received it in her hand as a bird receives the gift of a crumb in its beak. Just like a little bird, too, she hopped away. In a moment Mira and Annie heard the small, piping voice:

"Tag, yourn it; I'm playing tag wid you."

As Annie turned her head and glanced back at the child, a feeling that the world was a terribly empty place except for Nina, took hold of her. School seemed of no moment, and the home was drab and ugly except for Nina. Once more Annie was filled with gratitude for the possession of her little sister.

X

"Mama, I can't walk any more," wailed Annie when they were within a few blocks of the dispensary and, the snow notwithstanding, she sank down upon a stoop.

Mira's self-confident heart failed her for a moment. Annie looked pale as wax, and the rings under her eyes were purple. Should she have taken her daughter on this pilgrimage? The moment of agonizing uncertainty was followed by an inspiration. "I'll carry you," she cried. Lifting Annie, she lumbered along. Mira always insisted that a child's need gave a mother superhuman strength.

"Heavens! It's as if I was a baby!" wailed Annie, and, "Ma, you're so tired. Let me down."

But Mira would not.

A ragged gathering, blue-faced from the cold, had already assembled in a close-knit line outside the dispensary door.

Annie raised her head, opened her eyes wide, scanned the worried faces of the people standing in line waiting. The face of a young boy, covered with pimples, caught her eyes. A nausea came over her. She turned her head. "Mama, you must be tired," she said. "Let me stand up. I can now."

"Sha!" replied Mira.

Annie, turning her head, again glimpsed the boy's pimpled face. A shrinking horror seized her and persisted. It was as if the people gathered here were themselves diseases, exuding an infectious morbidness. She shuddered.

In the moment of Annie's subtle sensations, Mira was experiencing the solid fear of perishing while she waited for her turn to obtain the ticket of admission. It was now only half past one o'clock; the door would not open until two. She was tempted to set Annie on her feet but—Mira's eyes, swiftly roving, spotted a gap in the line close to the door. Hastily she made her way there, slipped into it, and stood breathing excitedly.

"Ma, they'll holler," came Annie's awed whisper.

Simultaneously a gruff female voice emanating from flesh bulging in all directions and covered with smeared khaki burst out in indignant singsong:

"Nu, what do you say to such cheek? We are standing here freezing for an hour already; she just came, and she has the cheek to push in ahead!"

Mira reddened. Shrewdly she observed the small dark-bearded man behind her, whose place she had usurped, and whose large brown eyes were abstractedly gazing into space. He was not one to quarrel. In a loud, sure voice, came her answer, "Really is that any of your business? It's this man's place I have taken, not yours. And if he sees I am a mother with a sick girl in my arms heavier than I am, and he takes pity and lets me in first, is it your business?" She might have been the victim of injustice, to judge from her tone.

The khaki dressed woman excitedly pushed up from her forehead the piece of white flannel headcovering that had fallen too low. "She has yet the cheek to make herself out right! God Almighty!" she cried, and was going to add that Mira need not pretend ignorance of the fact that she had displaced everyone behind Leba Brody, the little dark-bearded man, when she caught

sight of the superintending policeman who, attracted by the voices, was slowly approaching, swinging his club. In the same moment Mira, too, became aware of him. So did Leba Brody. Immediately a common spirit of defensiveness animated all three. The policeman was a common enemy.

When the officer, approaching the khaki dressed woman, asked what the matter was, she blurted with nervous nonchalance, "No, 'se natting," while with a trembling hand she again pushed up the piece of near-white flannel that once more had dropped too low over her forehead. Mira smiled ingratiatingly and innocently up at him, while the quiet of the tomb held all the rest. The officer loitered a moment, keeping on the alert, then moved on. The belligerents dropped their bone of contention and settled down to waiting.

After a while, "Mama, let me stand up," whispered Annie, as much out of distaste for such close proximity to her pugnacious mother as anything else. Mira hesitated, looked around. Certainly it was safer to have it appear that the big girl couldn't stand. But Annie was heavy. Mira yielded to temptation. Immediately Mira turned to the dark-eyed man behind her and opened a conversation with the shrewd intention of keeping his mind diverted.

Leba Brody was holding by the hand a tiny

likeness of himself, whose other hand was in a sling.

"That's your little boy?" Mira asked. "He is the image of you. What is the matter with his hand? Not, God forbid, broken?"

The man looked down upon his Izzie's upturned face, bent and wiped the child's watery eyes, looked up, sighed, "Yes, that's my boy. Ten years he is old." He spoke slowly, dreamily, with a touch of diffidence.

"What's the matter with his hand?" repeated Mira.

The man hesitated. "I'm a buttonhole maker and he helps—in the shop. He got a finger under the needle from the machine."

"Oigh gewald!" cried Mira, slapping her hands together, "don't tell me any more; I'm fainting away."

The man tapped his foot, shook his head, bit his lower lip, rolled his brown eyes, and said nothing more.

Izzie held up his hand. "Betcha life it hoit," he vouchsafed in a piping voice, "Ow! Ow!" He turned to his papa. "But I didn't cried not a woid, did I, Pop?" he boasted, throwing Annie a shy glance.

A sense of sickness went over Annie. She wanted to fly away from here.

But just then the dispensary door opened, despite the early hour. Mira seized Annie's hand

and, completely forgetting the brown-eyed man, left and took a place among the very first in the line. She came with the compelling force of a wind; there was no denying her; the woman whom she displaced this time did not even utter a word of objection.

XI

Behind an iron cage sat a straight-backed, pompadoured woman with those lines about the mouth that come to unmated women, and to men disappointed in their ambitions. She was the dispensary clerk who gave or denied tickets of admission. She served her questions upon an ice cold tongue and received her answers with the least possible hospitality. Through that sieve one human being after another passed from the cold street into the House of Healing, a room stuffy and mouldy, filled with dilapidated oak benches, the walls smelly, marred, dirty; the ceiling low, the atmosphere chilly and unfriendly. But this cold, snowy day everyone was glad to get indoors no matter through what sieve.

Dizzy, weary, feeling sick from the tips of her toes to the top of her head, Annie sank into her seat like a lump of lead. All she could say was "Oh!" but it came from the very core of her being.

A small, pale, troubled woman who sat behind

Mira with her eleven-year-old daughter who suffered from hip disease, bent over and asked, "What fails her?" pointing at Annie.

The distraught Mira glanced around. "I should know so of trouble," she replied. "She fell into a heat in the night."

"Only heat?"

"Only! Yes."

"Nu, that should not be hard to cure," the woman comforted, and went off into a tale of her little girl's hip which countless dispensary visits had so far failed to cure.

Chills shot up and down Annie's spine. She bit her lip nervously, and, glancing sidewise at her mother, hated her for having brought her here.

"Does she eat?" asked an interested third woman, toothless, and with the glassy eyes of a victim of exopthalmic goiter.

"What she has eaten in a week, a bird could carry away on its tail," replied Mira, her face a mass of troubled wrinkles.

"My boy—the same thing," sighed the other woman.

Mira's mind leaped to eager attention. "Really?" she cried, "really?" And no wonder Mira was eager. If she heard of enough other children afflicted as was Annie, the ailment would take on the aspect of an *"ubergang"* (epidemic) and grow slight in importance. A malady dis-

tributed among the many makes each only a small shareholder. So do the Miras reason. Epidemics hold little or no terror for them. They make light of the matter, brush it away with the hand. "*An ubergang—gur nit—*" (An epidemic—nothing—). But it was not Mira's good fortune to get a detailed answer, which alone would have sufficed to establish proof, for:

"ONE—TICKET NUMBER ONE!" clanged upon the foul air of the smudgy room.

Voices died out. Heads came forward. A dead hush fell.

Annie felt herself grow rigid. As in a nightmare she saw a large lame woman labor up from her seat, struggle forward on crutches toward the door which had been flung open simultaneously with the clanging of the voice.

"TWO! TICKET NUMBER TWO!"

A hunchback rose and stepped mincingly across the room.

"THREE!"

A little girl with a hectic flush, unaccompanied by anyone, who had sat nervously on the alert, jumped up and hastened forward, losing her breath on the way.

"FOUR! FOUR! TICKET NUMBER FOUR!"

A living skeleton with blue spectacles rose and felt his way to the door.

"My goodness! Are these really people?"

They seemed like dismal phantoms that had flocked into Annie's weary brain.

"FIVE!"

Mira jumped up in a flurry of excitement. "Our number," she whispered to Annie nervously and, as if her nervousness were contagious, Annie fell into such a tremble that she could not rise.

"Hurry up," said Mira. Annie tried to get to her feet. One foot hit against the seat, her skirt caught. All her nerves were aquiver.

"FIVE. SIX. SEVEN. EIGHT."

Mira, possessed by the fear that they were missing their turn, cried impatiently to Annie, "Come. Hurry. Annie. See."

Something seemed to snap in Annie's head.

A black blur came before her eyes. Was it she who was shrieking shrilly, "I can't stand it. I can't stand it. Take me home!" The voice sounded strange to her ears. . . . And was it she pouring forth a volley of abuse like hot lava? "You're stingy. You're mean to take me here. Papa gave you a dollar to take me to a doctor. You have no right to use it for anything else. This is a pest place—not for people——"

XII

The white-robed physician, a cynical smile playing under his shaggy mustache and dipping down into his beard, certain that the intelligence

of charity patients could always be pierced more effectively if one proceeded on the assumption that they were all deaf, flung questions and commands loudly, now at one, now at the other. "Hands down. Head up. Hurts you here? Here? Is that here? No, that's there. *Chamer du*—How old? Breathe deep. In, out. One, two. One, two. In, out . . ."

It was as though he were juggling balls.

His animation came to a dead halt when a hysterical girl was brought in.

And though there may be divers ways of dealing with hysteria, this physician had only one method. "Now shut up," he cried. "Hear me? This is no place for nonsense."

It acted like a brake upon the action of machinery. Annie came back to herself with a swift, sudden jerk. Her sobbing ceased instantly, but it seemed to turn back into her, and a dead-weight of bitterness seemed to descend upon her chest.

"Don't yell at me, sir," she said with dignity, "I'm not deaf, only sick."

"Sick, eh?" said he, his shrewd blue eyes looking through and through her.

When he had rapped and tapped his fill, he turned on Mira.

"Now, woman," he began, "are you really so ignorant that you didn't know you shouldn't take this Annie of yours out in such weather? You've had other children, no? They've been sick, no?

. . . Typhoid,'' he added, in an undertone to the nurse in attendance.

After that a buzzing in Annie's head made each word the doctor said sound as if it were dropping into a tin pail. ''Go home. Put her to bed. We'll send a doctor.''

''Oh, I do feel so sick,'' thought Annie, feeling her strength ebbing away through her very finger-tips.

Mira, reduced to dumbness, took her daughter's hand. Together they stumbled to the door where they met Leba Brody and his small son coming in.

''Nu?'' he asked eagerly, ''what fails her?''

Mira's eyes clouded over. ''Fails?'' She shrugged hopelessly. ''Fails her *enough.* She is provided for, what are you thinking?''

Leba Brody's heart beat with sympathy. ''Poor woman,'' he thought.

''NINETEEN, NINETEEN! For goodness sake get out! Get in!'' barked the official.

XIII

''Can you walk to the car?'' asked the troubled Mira. But in the same moment she lifted the unwilling Annie in her arms.

''Next block is the car,'' she said, and indeed, a car in sight, Mira broke into a choppy run.

What relief they both felt to be seated in the car, to be going home! The three chairs by the

window loomed up as a haven of rest in Annie's dazed, aching mind. She longed for them, and felt as if she had been away from home an eternity. She glanced up at her mother. An obscure unhappiness shot through her heart, for Mira's lips were set with worry, her face broken out in patches of red as always when she was excited.

"I screamed terribly at her—what made me scream like that?" But Annie was too tired, too full of aches, too weary for self-torture. Once again her chair-bed loomed up as a haven of rest. She jumped ahead mentally to the moment when she could sink down upon it. She breathed a warm, delicious peace, closed her eyes, relaxed. The rumble of the car in motion grew fainter. She was drifting away into space and into dreams that seemed real. . . . She dreamed she was very hot, for it was one of those scorching days when women all sit around on the street idly, and gossip. . . .

Suddenly their idleness switches off into hustle and bustle, for it is Friday afternoon, the Sabbath hanging close overhead. . . . A woman flies into the house to borrow a saucepan, another to borrow a pinch of salt, another to let your mother taste of a savory dish. . . . At last mama's work is done. . . . She has finished ordering you around and sends you off to Rutgers Street dock for your weekly free plunge. . . . Ssh! She forgot something! . . . You

must take the *chulnt* (stew) to the baker's in whose oven it bakes brown and much better than in the broken stove at home. . . . Well, you are on your way, with the pot in your hands, walking cautiously lest you trip and spill the stew. . . . You hate the baker's cellar; it is smelly and mouldy, the bakers themselves stand around half naked and look at you with smiles that somehow embarrass you. Sometimes they snicker, dig each other in the ribs. You are relieved when you have the nickel paid for the service and are once more out on the street. But the sour smell of sweat, the bakers' smell, follows you out. . . . Nina and Libbie are on the street waiting for you. Thank goodness. . . . You'll go to the Rutgers Street dock now, at once, for you are dying to get into the cool water. What luck that mama discovered such a place! . . . You are there. How wonderful to get out of all your clothes, to have nothing standing between your hot body and the slight breeze of this stifling hot day! . . . Now for the pool! . . . Down the slippery stairs you go. The water looks dark, muddy. Maybe it can make you sick? What difference? In you go. . . .

A chill awoke Annie. She opened her eyes and stared unknowingly. Then wide awake, she wailed, "Is it Division Street yet?" Oh, how she ached!

"Yes," answered Mira, to whom the clatter of

the elevated was a welcome sound. She peered anxiously out of the car window for a sight of little Nina. There was to be not a moment's delay on account of the child's unwillingness to follow upstairs. And as she stepped off the car, she still peered.

A black throng of people. They seemed to be gathered right in front of their very own house. A fire? Somebody run over?

Voices shouting each other down.

Mira's brows gathered as her small blue eyes went on the half block ahead of her to investigate. Someone lifted something—a scarlet flash. Mira stood a moment, dazed with unreality. She took a few steps with a strange, dragging hesitation, and, "Oh, woe is me!" escaped her. Annie, startled, raised heavy eyes. A limp scarlet little bundle! A knife drove into her entrails. Her knees knocked and she tried to stiffen them.

The crowd surged forward.

"She was ranned over," cried somebody.

And the rest, getting the clue, reiterated despairingly, "She was ranned over."

An unearthly shriek left Annie's breast as Mira, fainting, fell to the ground.

"Nina!"

XIV

One stood in better with Feifa Teitelbaum, the boss of the men's coat shop in which Yekel

worked as a bastings puller, if one lingered a little after hours to do this trifle or that, giving the appearance of devotion to one's work. Although Yekel had more reason to cringe in this way than any of the other workers, with his handicap of drunkenness, he did so less than anyone else. This day, however, he had been so keenly aware of Feifa Teitelbaum's disapproving glances that he felt the very safety of his job depended upon his redeeming himself in this way, and he quite made up his mind that he would. But when the six o'clock dismissal gong struck he was seized with such an urge to get home and find out how Annie was that he dropped his work and without the least attempt to conceal his eagerness, left the shop.

He walked fast through the dingy East Side streets, feeling peculiarly excited, peering ahead as if he expected at any moment to catch a glimpse of Annie. His excitement mounted steadily. He had no control over himself. At last he turned the corner into Division Street. His eyes fell upon a group of people gathered near the tenement. They seemed intensely absorbed in each other. Somehow, Yekel resented this; he wanted to make his way into the house unobserved, hastily. He had always wanted to do this, sober or drunk, for he knew that through Mira all the neighbors knew all about him. As if to give them time to disperse, he slackened his pace.

But they kept on standing there and jabbering. Yekel, drawing closer, lowered his eyes. Involuntarily, he raised them again and at once observed that the group had transferred its attention to him. He frowned darkly. He dropped his eyes again and then once more glanced up involuntarily. He caught sight of the news-carrying expression of one of the women's faces. Something snapped in Yekel's soul. He stopped short. His mouth automatically opened and shut upon silence. As in a fog he saw women raise the corners of shawls to their eyes, sway from side to side in rhythm to their lamentations, "Oigh wei, wei!" Yekel dragged his feet forward; a half deadness was upon him. The next moment, utter oblivion came over him; he stood unseeing, unknowing. And then there followed sharp, swift intuition: "Is—she—dead?" . . .

"Oigh wei, wei!"

XV

There is nothing Ghetto neighbors take so readily upon themselves as the sharing of another's grief. Yekel opened the door upon a room full of men, women and children, all of whom were echoing poor Mira's wails and lamentations.

Death! It shouted out at Yekel from every corner. There, in the middle of the room, on the floor—a small figure covered with black—"God Almighty!"

Yekel stood stark, dazed beyond all sense of reality. Then a terrible feeling of anguish tore through him. "Annie, dead!" he cried under his breath, "My God!" The soul of him seemed to collapse. He shielded his eyes with one hand, as if to shut out the truth. Immediately then he recovered himself. Where was Mira?—she who had tampered with Annie. What had Mira done while he was away? Enmity ravaged his heart. He staggered farther into the room, lurching against the table. "You," he cried thickly at Mira, holding up a shaking hand, warningly, "—did—did you take her to the doctor?"

"Nu, he is drunk at that," whispered a neighbor in a leaden tone, and, moving to one side, left free to view the chair-bed by the window upon which Yekel only vaguely perceived a figure.

He continued to address his wife, "I asked you a civil question, I want an answer!" he thundered in a strange tone.

Mira, prostrated, was unable to understand him; she stared up at him vacantly.

Yekel went white to the lips. He lurched forward. "I'll—I'll have your answer—" he stood over Mira like a madman, tense with his madness.

And it was only then that Annie, dazed with fever, noticed his presence. She sat bolt upright.

"Papa! Oh papa!" she cried out to him, "Nina—little Nina—They've killed her. Papa—Oh. . ." Her grief was terrible.

Yekel stood a moment as if he could not believe he had heard her voice. His face was like wood. Then a mighty twitch distorted his features. He made several reeling lurches forward and sank upon his knees before the chair-bed.

"My—my love child!" Yekel moaned impotently, burying his head in the crook of his arm. The soul of him leaped to a day in the past—a day wild with snow and wind, the day when drunkenness came upon him for the first time. And then Annie and one Regina became hopelessly entangled in his mind, and a wild unreasoning love tore at him.

"She lives!" he moaned. "She lives—Regina —Annie—my love child!"

BOOK TWO

XVI

FROM his earliest childhood Yekel had preferred being alone, nor could anyone break him of the habit. And he had always been given to silence. Once when he was six years old he disappeared from home for a full day and night. No amount of coaxing could induce him to tell where he had been or what he had done.

A beating brought about his confession. He had climbed to the top of the mountain to find the man who "pushed out the dark and let in the light." He was disappointed enough at failing to make the discovery.

The beating he received threw him into a state of melancholy. He would not play. He would not eat. He sat aimlessly about, peering at the sky, wondering and brooding, feeling cheated and thwarted.

Life had held little but misery for him until one day shortly afterwards he discovered that a rubber band when stretched and manipulated with a finger gave out music. He was fascinated. He would sit, all hunched up, running a finger quickly,

then slowly over the rubber band, then very, very slowly. Where did the sound come from? He could not find out. He grew disgusted at last and threw the rubber band away. The very sight of a rubber band thereafter was abhorrent to him for it seemed to have a mercilessness about it.

Four years more brought him to religious doubts. In the village lived a simpleton, Berel by name. It did not seem possible to Yekel that God could have taken the trouble to create this creature at whom everybody jeered. Berel whined and sniveled, and showed the fear of a baby when you struck a match in his grown-up presence. Now, why should God have made him? Not God but Chance made Berel, so Yekel concluded. Concluding thus, Yekel saw Chance behind the whole order of the universe. Through Chance he was Yekel and not Berel, and the whole world was what it was. As for God: man had created Him. Yes, man had created God and not God man. There was no God at all. One day Yekel walked up to the rabbi of the *Chedar* (religious school) and handed him his Bible. "I am through," he said with dignity, and walked away. Nobody after that could persuade him to attend *Chedar* again.

Little by little sex consciousness stole upon Yekel. When he was less than eleven years old he could contain his curiosity no longer. He went

to his mother and asked her pointblank: "Where do babies come from?"

The horrified woman slapped him full over the mouth. "Sinner!" she shouted, and ran and told her husband.

The stricken parents prayed to God for guidance. God sent them divine advice: Yekel should be married. Though they decided to do this, at thirteen Yekel was not yet married, partly because his parents had not found a suitable bride, and partly because he had never repeated his offence. Yekel had gone with the burning question to the deserted rabbi, and had received a full answer.

With a knowledge of sex, a sense of silent awe became Yekel's. All of womankind took on a new meaning for him. From pretty girls he felt infinitely remote, as if they were creatures of some legend or myth. His mother seemed a different, a more important person from what he had ever thought her. And as for his sister, Mollie, an unfathomable mystery seemed suddenly to surround her. Her quiet manner, her soft voice would make his heart jump. Once he surreptitiously watched her undress. The beauty of her fascinated him; he could scarcely contain himself against a desire to run out and touch her white skin. After that he carried about an immense respect for her, and treated her with extreme courtesy.

It was when he was fourteen years old that he fell in love with Regina, the gentile girl serving in his uncle's barroom.

Regina was beautiful. She had light brown curls, and deep blue eyes. Though a girl of only sixteen years, she was well versed in the wisdom of women. She was not long in discerning her attraction for Yekel. It inspired her to cut special capers in his presence. In a way that hypnotized Yekel, Regina would cock her head sidewise, hold her arms akimbo, throwing one elbow forward and the other back, and, expanding her mature breast, would emit a rippling, musical chuckle. At other times she would cock her head forward and peer at him as if in anger, abruptly sauntering off to the bar, from where she would throw him a bewitching smile, or a contradictory wink. Yekel watched her drift from one attitude into another as if she were a play of light, a trick of fantasy, as if at any moment the reality of her would vanish. His uncle soon sensed Yekel's infatuation, and went to Yekel's parents in great alarm. They, in turn, seized with panic, could not forgive themselves their dilatoriness. At once they found Mira, with a good dowry and rabbinical ancestry to recommend her, as a bride for Yekel. But she was red-headed and not particularly good looking, and it was rumored of her that she had the temper that proverbially accompanies red hair. But then it was no longer a question of

choice; the boy had to be saved from the "*shicksa*" (gentile girl).

When Yekel learned that he was to be married, he went through a whirlwind of emotions. He was dazed at first, then, with a clearer realization, he fell even more passionately in love with Regina. In a rage against his own defenselessness he grew angry at his parents, at his uncle, even at his innocent sister, each in turn, and then at all of them together, and he had moments when he felt he could find relief only in violence. The conflict raging in his soul made him stare at people in queer, sightless fashion, as if he were looking up for help. Then once, for an instant, curiosity flitted into him. Who was this Mira? Thoughts darted hither and thither in his mind like flies under a ceiling. Mere boy though he was and without real understanding, desire began to run about in his blood. Under the spell, he once asked his mother what his bride looked like. "Ah ha!" they cried, "*er intressert zich shon!*" (He is becoming interested!) They smiled gratification, but all that Yekel learned was that his bride was a rabbi's daughter.

As the wedding day drew near, Yekel even grew glad, and yet Regina lay like a mist of sadness upon his boy heart. His gladness pulled him one way and his sadness another way. He felt storm-tossed and tearful, drawn to something, somewhere, through a great labyrinth.

And thus Yekel was married to Mira without his ever even having seen her.

XVII

Years after his marriage came the event which marked the beginning of Yekel's downfall, brought him and Mira and their four children to America, and gave Mira to know that she was married to a phantom, a ghost, the real substance of whom loved and belonged to Regina, the barmaid.

The day had opened clear, but late in the morning clouds rose and by noon a wild storm had burst. It rained and hailed and snowed; heaven and earth seemed to tumble about each other, each as if fighting desperately for supremacy.

Of all days Yekel had chosen this one to go to Kretinga, a neighboring town, to buy stock for the store. Mira had foretold the storm; she had warned him not to go. He had not listened. It seemed to him as if her voice sounded in the wind that blew. As if to escape her voice, he decided to seek shelter in an inn. No wind could blow there. When the storm lifted, he would proceed farther. . . . He looked up and beheld a sign, "The Regina Inn." His breath left him for a swift second. But it was with no expectation of discovering his former love that he walked slowly up the too straight and narrow

flight of wooden steps and opened the door of the inn.

In the farther end of the large, bare room, before an open fireplace whence came the crackling sound of burning wood, stood a beautiful woman's figure. When the door opened, she turned her head. . . . A little older she was —and, oh, more beautiful, more beautiful.

"Regina!" Yekel called, as to a vision, "Regina!"

Her blue eyes opened wide. Her lips parted like two red rose petals. She took a few hesitating steps forward. She threw one hand up before her eyes. . . . The other hand automatically flew to her breast.

"You!" she cried, "Oh——"

And they fell into each other's arms.

Time passed.

They sat talking.

"So you loved me though you married her? Well, it's a strong man you were to let religion stand in your way, when you say you don't care for it. I *do* care—I go to church—I believe in Jesus Christ—but so help me God I loved you so——" Regina looked around, frightened at the sound of her own voice. "Drink another glass," she whispered, once more looking cautiously about, then bending forward toward Yekel. And as he finished drinking the whiskey she held up to his lips, she flung herself upon his breast.

Yekel stroked her brown curls; his heart and soul wept, and he felt so at peace. Holding her close, kissing her over and over again, he murmured passionately, "Regina—lovely Regina, I love you—I loved you—I love you. *She's*—she's a stranger—a terrible stranger—I never reach anything in her. A man is not satisfied with just any woman. I deny it. It's you, Regina—love. Love is the only stopping place in life; without it the heart, the soul wanders, gets nowhere, is never satisfied, Regina. Oh, lovely Regina." And Yekel ran his trembling, drunken hand up and down Regina's shapely arm, up and down, up and down. . . .

"It's true," cried Regina, straining him to her breast. . . .

"God damn!" A hoarse voice broke upon them.

Yekel looked up.

Regina's husband, big brute of a man, stood in the doorway . . . A rush . . . a heavy blow on the head . . . a fierce hand at the throat . . . Yekel is outdoors where heaven and earth in terrible conflict are whirling a cold white sheet through the air, that envelopes, blinds him. It is freezing, stinging cold, and the mind is so muddled, so confused with the wind and the cold and the snow that Yekel has no idea where a man must go to escape it. He rubs his hands and then slaps them over his smarting ears as he blunders dazedly on.

That crunching sound beneath the feet, it makes him think of potato-pudding crust between the teeth. Strange . . . The pudding crust is always so hot you have to roll it around in your mouth before you can close your jaws on it. This beneath the feet is so cold! . . . Potato-pudding crust. Mira. The children. Home. Oh, home! That is where a man must go to escape this insanity of the weather. Yekel's heart stands still. . . . And Regina? No more Regina? A great beyond with only Mira! A great empty beyond! A terrible desolation comes over him that tears at his heart, at his throat, chokes him, chokes him . . . One must shriek for help. . . .

A man is there at his elbow, come to his rescue. . . .

It is dark, terribly cold, and the wagon bumps so.

Only Mira is at home. The children, she says to the man who has brought Yekel home, were caught in the storm and are with their grandmother, where they will spend the night. And how worried she has been about her husband! Her heart had told her something had gone wrong with him. . . . But what is *that?* He stinks of whiskey! Where could he have been?

The rescuer laughs and is off.

Alone with Mira. She taunts, "This only you needed to make you all good . . . Drink! And that is what kept you so long? . . ."

Those tiny, incisive blue eyes!

"If—if I'm so imperfect—if—if I suit you so little—why don't you let—let me go?"

"And your band of children? . . . I would let you go to the black years. . ."

Children. Babies. Regina. Mira. Women.

Yekel's eyes travel over Mira's flat body.

A scorching flame leaps up in him. A blur comes before his eyes. Unsteadily he rises from his seat. As in a mist Mira does the same, and turns pale. He shuffles forward; she shifts backward. Finally he has her pressed close against the wall, and magically for a moment she becomes Regina, warm and soft and lovely.

A wind howls outside. Let her scream! She will not be heard . . . She shrieks in his face, "Drunkard!"

Yekel laughs, rubs his face against hers, snaps a finger now against one of her cheeks, now against the other.

"Drunkard! Drunkard! Drunkard!"

He lifts her up in his arms. He crushes her. He stifles her . . . He carries her into an inner room, stammering, "My Regina! My Regina!"

* * * * *

Then came a day when he lay hunched up on a haystack, the hot sun beating down. From a cottage some distance away, the shrieks of Mira in child-labor pierced his mind, dull with drink.

During intervals of quiet he sat up, chewing his fingernails, and now and then wiping his perspiring face with a large bandanna handkerchief. For all his efforts he could not recall how many times he had been drunk in the nine months since the night of the storm at Kretinga. A piercing shriek always broke off his calculations.

The harsh voice of his mother-in-law, close to his ear roused him.

"A father! Such a father! Drunk he is on the day of his child's birth. A girl as beautiful as the sun, with eyes blue as the heavens, and she even has brown hair . . . A father! A drunkard! A disgrace! A rabbi's son-in-law should be a drunkard! Out of this town you will go, you good-for-nothing, and not a trace of you to be left! Go to America where all the apostates live and where you belong."

His own mother laid a gentle hand on his head.

"It's a girl," she said softly, with tears. She helped him rise. Then she broke down with weeping. "My son, my son," she mourned. The sound of her weeping tore at Yekel's dulled soul. He clutched at his breast and strove to speak. His mind cleared a little.

"Mama—It's—I," he stammered, and fell back into a stupor.

Suddenly Regina with arms akimbo, one elbow forward and the other back came before Yekel's eyes. He raised a troubled countenance to his

grief-stricken mother. "Did you say she has blue eyes and brown hair?" His voice trembled as if shaken by the wind. "Blue eyes? Brown hair?" he repeated. And when his mother answered, "Yes" he reiterated to himself in an awed voice, "Blue eyes! Brown hair!" . . . Before his inner vision persisted Regina, beautiful, irresistible.

"Such eyes! Such hair!" clanged the mother-in-law's voice, strangely like Mira's. "Fui! Out of this town, you apostate, you drunkard, you'll go! Away, away to America, where such as you belong."

Listening to the abuse, Yekel's soul paused. The very atmosphere seemed to pause, the wind abruptly ceased to blow. Even the mother-in-law was impelled to silence. It was as if the thought gripping Yekel emanated a paralyzing force . . . Yekel swallowed hard. His frame seemed to stiffen, to become rigid, and then, quick as a flash, to droop, then fall to pieces. He put his hand before his mouth to stifle a sob. "She—she's my love child!" he thought, while a sudden light flooded the horizon.

The wind began to blow again.

The two women helped him rise and led him home.

Thus passed the event that brought about Yekel's downfall, the event that drove him and Mira and their four children to America.

XVIII

The day of Nina's funeral, while a neighbor worked about the house putting it in order for the returning mourners, Annie lay with closed eyes on the chair-bed. She was sick—sick in body and soul. She tried to realize that little Nina was dead. Nina never would talk again, laugh again, play again! Gone forever? "It can't be," she moaned. "It can't be so." There was an unmerciful void in her heart, and her body ached so. Presently she remembered the dispensary doctor, who had called late the previous night. "Can you die of typhoid fever?" she wondered. She tried to picture herself dead, but that was as impossible as it was to believe that Nina, dear little Nina, was gone forever. . . . She began to feel restless. Her head ached; she wanted to cry but she was too exhausted to do so. She buried her head in the pillow; her father appeared bringing Nina in by the hand. She heard him say, with a smile of delight, that it had all been a mistake, that Nina was alive and well, and that she wanted to play, "My mother said——"

The neighbor noisily put a chair to one side.

Annie raised her eyes. A sharp realization of the blank truth of things struck her like a great blow in the face. Terror assailed her. She would have screamed, if a rap had not sounded on the door.

XIX

The neighbor opened the door upon the breezy figure of the dispensary doctor, whose blue eyes smiled.

Doctor Ellis' smile flickered out abruptly.

"Why, what's the matter, little girl?" he called to Annie from the door, genuinely touched by the misery written upon her young face. In his long contact with the poor, George Ellis had become inured to the sight of tragedy, but there was something about the tragedy he had come upon in this home the night before that had touched a sympathetic chord within him. Besides, Annie promised to be an interesting "case."

He smiled again as he sat down on the edge of Annie's chair-bed. He flipped her under the chin, to rouse her from her depression. But Annie jerked her head away and fell to sobbing bitterly.

Doctor Ellis did not know what to say; he could not strike a note of cheer; something in Annie's sobbing forbade it. He felt her pulse. Presently he bent over her.

"Don't cry," he said gently, "it doesn't do any good."

Out in the hall dragging footsteps sounded. This time the neighbor opened the door upon the desolate figures of Mira, Yekel, Gussie and Libbie back from the burial.

At sight of Doctor Ellis, Mira wrung her hands. "Doctor, Doctor," she moaned, "such a sorrow! Such a sorrow. Oh, help our Annie that she may get well, help her. It is too much to bear."

Doctor Ellis beckoned her and Yekel to follow him into the bedroom.

"She has not high fever just now," he said, "and I think she will be all right if you give her these powders one at a time regularly every half hour."

Mira resumed her weeping and lamentations, touching Yekel to the quick. His eyes cast down, he put one hand on her arm and stroked it gently. With the other hand, he took the medicine from Doctor Ellis and in a choked voice promised to administer it according to instructions.

Automatically the three turned back.

In the room-of-all-affairs, Mira sank down upon the wooden box that the neighbor had provided for the customary *shiva.* Mechanically Yekel drew the box meant for him up to Annie's chair-bed and also sat down. As he glanced from Annie to Mira, a terrible contrition for his deficiency as a husband held Yekel a moment. The next moment he was thinking of Annie, with a love that was desperate, overwhelming. He heaved a sigh and dropped his head into the palms of his hands.

Mira, seeing his grief, began her lamentations all over again.

"My child, my crown, my little Nina, my heart! Dead. Dead. Oh, my poor mother-heart."

With a great effort Yekel rose and went over to her. "Try to be brave," he said. Very softly he added, "Poor Mira," as Doctor Ellis called out, "There, there. *Nu, ja, aber, doch das dürfst du nicht,*" and he proceeded to tell Mira what reasons for gratitude were left her.

Mira grew silent, and Yekel irritated by Doctor Ellis, went back to his place on the box.

"Good-by now," called out Doctor Ellis cheerily, "I will be here again to-morrow. And no more crying, neither from you, mother, nor you, Miss Annie. Don't let them." This last to Yekel who, against his will, looked away annoyed, and thought:

"I will take care of my child myself."

And as Yekel sat and watched beside Annie through the night, he uttered a prayer in his heart, uttered it time and again: "God grant it may be nothing serious." His soul sought a compact with God. He made a promise: "I will keep sober. I will keep sober."

XX

The next day Annie was worse, and by noon she was delirious.

Then followed long days during which the fever ran its course.

A strange calm was upon Yekel. Tormented

in soul by the sight of Annie's suffering, he was nevertheless calm, as if he knew that his compact with God assured her final recovery.

All through the long days while he sat a prisoner in Feifa Teitelbaum's shop, Yekel had but one thought: Annie must recover. And for the nights, he had but one plan: to sit by her bedside and tend her. He seemed to have no need for rest. Night after night he kept vigil. He watched her every move. He ministered to her so painstakingly, so tenderly that, sick as Annie was, she was puzzled by him, and also grateful to him. It felt so good to have his devotion. In her pain, she would call plaintively:

"Papa. Oh, papa."

Yekel would grope clumsily for her hand and sit stroking it, unable to speak. At moments, despite himself, misgiving would assail him. As if by penitence to win the favor of the fates, he would make promises in his heart: The future would not be like the past. He would never be the same man that he had been. This suffering had been sent him that he might learn to be a better man. Henceforth he was done with whiskey, and his inarticulateness, and his disinterestedness in his family. God would see—he, Yekel, would keep all his promises!

XXI

Doctor Ellis, who had to exercise his sharpest

ingenuity to save Annie, was tremendously gratified when she began to show signs of improvement. As he sometimes caught her brooding about Nina, and feared its retarding effect, he took pains to cheer her up. He would prolong his visits, and sit and talk to her:

"What class did you say you are in at school?"

"Graduating."

"My, we're smart!" He would flip her under the chin, while he observed whether her eyes were clear as they should be. What did she plan to do after she was graduated from public school?

"I'm going to college."

"To college, eh? And what to learn, pretty maiden?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No."

"*Don't* know."

She would smile. He would laugh.

Whenever he could think of something facetious to say, Doctor Ellis would say it. "Tell me, pretty nut-brown lassie, have you ever wondered why a watermelon is red?"

Annie had not wondered about this; she shook her head negatively.

"Why?" she asked, lifting shy, smiling eyes.

"Niggers love it, and red looks well against black."

But better than anything, Annie liked to have

him read stories to her. One fairy tale particularly impressed her. It was a tale about a sweet, patient girl, abused by a stepmother, who was at last rescued by a charming prince. Subconsciously Annie identified herself with the heroine and Doctor Ellis with the prince. She showed so much enthusiasm over this story, that Doctor Ellis laughed about it.

Annie loved to hear Doctor Ellis laugh. It sounded like music to her. Often when she didn't see any reason for laughing, she laughed just because he did. She loved him; with each of his visits she loved him more. He was wonderful in every way. He was so handsome, tall and straight. He breathed a freshness and a cleanliness. His clothes always looked as if they had just then come from under the tailor's iron. He seemed to be of a world of which one dared only to dream, of a world as different from Division Street and tenements, as a fairy-land is different from a pigsty.

Of course Doctor Ellis loved her, thought Annie. It made her very happy.

The knowledge of his love, verified by all his conduct, his long visits, his little gifts, and his confidences about his personal affairs, lifted Annie out of her own, and linked her with Doctor Ellis' environment; it gave her a sense of remoteness from the family, her father included. She quite forgot how she had clung to Yekel all

through the critical period of her illness. Doctor Ellis seemed somehow to cancel all that.

And Doctor Ellis was delighted that his friendship was having such a good effect. Nor was he conscious of making any sacrifice; Annie Cohen was a very pretty little girl and Doctor Ellis was alert to feminine attractiveness even when it was only fourteen years old.

XXII

Annie's devotion to Doctor Ellis had a strange effect upon Yekel. He was jealous; he felt cheated, and resentful. The distaste he had conceived for Doctor Ellis from the first, turned into a violent dislike. And toward Annie he felt bitter. It was as if she had coquetted with him. He would watch them both out of disapproving eyes, his heart fluttering like a jealous lover's. He had at all times to exert control over himself not to speak out. When he feared that he could not restrain himself, he would clump away to the parlor and there, always in the dark, he would sit and play his violin. Sad, melancholy tunes he played, that stirred a curious disharmony in Annie's soul as she listened to Doctor Ellis' cheery speech rising against their sombre background.

They puzzled Annie, these tunes, made her restless. She was often tempted to cry out to

her father to stop playing, but something would not let her.

XXIII

Yekel had made a compact with God; he had promised to be a different, a better man. Now he ridiculed himself for it. What had he to do with God? Suffering had made him spiritually lame and he had taken God for a crutch. He smiled contemptuously inside.

One day sitting over his monotonous shop work, Yekel resolved to have done with his reformed self.

As the day wore on, his resolution grew more intense, until he tingled with it, and with a sense of liberation.

But when the day was ended and he found himself free to go to the saloon, an odd hesitation seized him. It was as if he would call the wrath of the fates down upon Annie by yielding to his desire. Something within him mocked his fear, called it ridiculous superstition. But still Yekel wavered. While he debated with himself, he hastened homeward. All of a sudden he was caught by a conviction that for his very thought of drink, Annie would suffer. Horror assailed him. He saw Annie sick again, and this time he was powerless to nurse her back to life.

He walked so fast he lost his breath.

Reaching the tenement, he hurried up the

rickety stairs, fearful and eager to get to the sick-room and learn the truth.

XXIV

"When do you think I can get up?" Annie asked Doctor Ellis.

The doctor's blue eyes twinkled. He could tell by Annie's impending tears that the oft expressed desire to get up was turning into impatience.

"Oh," he drawled, "well, now, let's see. This is Tuesday? Been in bed four months? Well, one more minute and we can get up."

"Ah, now, I'm not fooling," cried Annie, "I'm tired of lying in bed."

"And I'm tired of walking. As a rule, man's a fool; when it's hot, he wants it cool; when it's cool, he wants it HOT; always wanting what is not."

Annie had never heard the rhyme before. She burst out into merry laughter and hugged Doctor Ellis' arm.

It was upon this scene that Yekel opened the door—Yekel tortured with anxiety about his love child, whom he imagined ill, dead perhaps, cursed for his sin!

Standing in the doorway a brief moment he looked like a hulk of dirty flesh, turned into stone.

A feeling of revulsion swept over Annie, followed by alarm, for she caught a threatening

expression on her father's face. The next moment she was hearing indistinctly a low angry voice: "Say yung feller——" The rest was shut out from her because of a buzzing in her ears.

The darkness of Yekel's eyes seemed to obliterate all the light of the room. She could not see distinctly. Was her father's chest heaving? Did Doctor Ellis look indignant? Was he putting on his hat to leave?

Mira's voice sounded in the hall and arrested the attention of all three. "Never you mind, Gussie," she was saying, "your mother is no fool. When she says it's better once to be married than twice to be an old maid, you can believe it's true."

Yekel emitted a short, sharp laugh, turned abruptly, and clumped away to the parlor.

Then Doctor Ellis called out "Good-by" to her and "Hello" to Gussie and mama who opened the door.

The next moment the room was empty of Doctor Ellis and full of mama's voice: "No child should disobey a parent. A parent knows what's best for a child. Every girl should marry. If a girl can't, through some ill luck, get her own man, there are match-makers. Nicer girls than you have let their mothers engage match-makers. You ought to be glad you have a mother who is interested enough in you to want to marry you off. You would be a beautiful sight as an old maid;

wrinkled, sallow, with a gray braid of hair. I have had plenty of sorrow; you might feel sorry enough for me, if you were a good daughter, to want to give me a little joy. Nothing would give me more joy than to see you safely married. You are of age—plenty old enough—it won't be long now before you will be on the down grade. A girl fades soon enough when she works in a shop and hasn't too good a life otherwise. Take my advise. I am no fool." Then abruptly: "My God, what are we to do about the twenty-five dollar debt we got into on account of Annie's sickness!" Mira's thoughts had a way of sweeping one right into the other.

A brooding silence followed her question.

At last, from Gussie, in her soft phlegmatic voice: "It's the busy season in the shop. I'll bring home night work. We can make a little extra money that way."

An empty pot fell from Mira's hand with a clang. *"Oigh, gewalt!"* she cried, stooping to pick up the pot, "A brilliant idea! Libbie and I can both help. A brilliant idea!" Her shrill voice tore the foul air of the room.

A sense of profound distress invaded Annie's soul. Such a mother! Such a father! Such a house!

In the parlor on the lounge sat Yekel, his eyes plunged into space, his heart beating with a feeling of triumph.

XXV

One day, two days, three days passed, and Doctor Ellis did not come. Annie began to consider the idea that he might never come again. But her innermost self refused to accept the possibility. She knew distinctly that something had happened between Doctor Ellis and her father, but what it was, she was not sure. Something told her that Doctor Ellis had been offended. She could not imagine why her father should have wanted to offend Doctor Ellis, nor why Doctor Ellis should have allowed himself to be offended. She was so harassed by the whole perplexing thing, that she could think of nothing else. She lay in silence on her chair-bed, her eyes glued upon the tenement opposite, listening for Doctor Ellis' footsteps.

A week passed, and still he had not come.

Eager as Annie had been to get out of bed, she was equally anxious now to stay there, as if by getting up she would be accepting Doctor Ellis' dismissal, and agreeing to his never coming to see her again. She hungered for him.

Another day passed, and for some obscure reason Annie felt resentment toward her father. His footsteps grated on her nerves. She felt him an intrusion into her life, a noose about her neck. That day, Mira seeing Annie's restlessness, persuaded her to rise a little; she had her sit up for

supper. The effort tired Annie. Immediately after supper, she lay down again.

Acting upon her inspiration, Gussie had, for almost a week now, been bringing home night-work. As soon as the supper dishes were washed, Mira, Libbie and Gussie gathered in a ragged circle in the middle of the room and began to sew buttons on boys' pants.

Mira said to Gussie: "Yes, my daughter, you may be bored by my telling you this so often, but it is better to be married once than to be an old maid twice." A pause. "Every mother wants the joy of seeing her daughters married." Another pause. "Worse mothers than I get this much joy out of life. I have borne children, and buried children, but I have never married one off. I have shed tears, but I have had no joys. If you have it in your power to give your mother a little joy, see, my child, why do you hold back?" A sigh. "If you went out and met men, I would not insist on a match-maker. But where do you go, and whom do you meet? Girls that stay home and do night-work, and who all day slave in a shop and meet men not good enough for them to marry, remain old maids." Mira spat out. "I do not want an old maid on my hands. I have had enough sorrow."

Every night of the week, Mira had spoken upon this subject, and in this same way. Gussie was nearing her twenty-third birthday, and anxiety

on the score of her marriage prospects had suddenly assailed Mira, so that she could scarcely think of anything else. Certainly it had seemed for a week now that she could speak of nothing else. Even Libbie was bored. Sniffing audibly, bumping her foot against her chair, she cried, "Oh, ma, why do you ask her? Go get a match-maker. It's none of her business if you want to do it." Turning to Gussie: "You mind mama always so much, why don't you mind her now too? You don't have to marry the match-maker, if you don't like whiskers, but he can bring you a a nice young man to marry. Everybody gets married. I'm gonne get married. All the girls in my class say they're gonne get married, so why can't you, if it's gonne give mama a little bit of pleasure?"

She sniffed again, coughed, flung herself from side to side in her chair. She made such an amusing picture, that Mira and Gussie laughed.

With their laughing mingled the low sounds of Yekel's violin. He was playing "Traumerei" in the dark parlor.

Libbie, missing Annie's laughter, called out to her knowingly:

"Say Ann, don' je be such a innocent one. Never mind, *I* know." Libbie had her own ideas about Annie's and George Ellis' friendship.

Annie came abruptly out of the musing into which Yekel's music and Mira's monologue had

taken her; she had been dreaming of the prince of the fairy-tale, to whom she was the fair maiden.

Before she had a chance to answer Libbie, a knock sounded on the door and almost immediately Doctor Ellis came in. No one had heard his footsteps.

Professionally anxious to make certain that his patient could be discharged, Doctor Ellis had at last resolved to make a short, final visit, in spite of the offensive, drunken father, who, in his common soul, probably suspected that he, Doctor Ellis, intended to charge for his visits and therefore prolonged them.

He seemed like an apparition, the more so because his visit was so brief. When the door had closed on him, Annie could scarcely realize either that he had been with her, or that he had left, and equally unbelievable was it that he was the same Doctor Ellis who had come and gone so many times before; he had been so unfriendly this time!

Why had her father stopped his playing? It seemed to her he was prying into her feelings. What right had he to pry into her feelings?

The next moment, by an uncanny intuition, Annie knew that her father had deliberately calculated to deprive her of Doctor Ellis' friendship, though precisely why she did not know even yet. First she was puzzled, and then she was indig-

nant. A feeling of hatred for her father was about to surge up in her, when her mother pulled her up by crying:

"Oh, Gussele, Gussele, now we have something really to celebrate. Let us celebrate, let us celebrate. What better way to celebrate is there than by a wedding? See, let your mother make a match for you. See, I beg you."

Gussie dropped her eyes acquiescently, just as Yekel, who had heard everything, looked furtively into the room from the parlor. He wanted to make certain that Doctor Ellis had left. Jealous enmity had torn through his heart like a sudden storm. He had heard the door close and with it peace had returned to Yekel, but he wanted to be sure his peace was fully justified. Satisfied that Doctor Ellis was gone, the thought passed abstractedly through his mind: "She wants to marry her daughter off to any man at all as long as he can support her." The next moment he was vividly alive to the baseness of match-making, and he felt disgust for Mira.

Perversely he struck up a lively tune on his violin.

"I *did* send away your doctor friend. Well, what if I did? Don't you like it? Lump it," said the lively tune to Annie. For a moment she lay tense, then she cried out:

"Oh, for goodness sake, papa, stop that playing of yours! It makes me sick. It makes me

sick! And you, mama, stop your chatter about match-makers, match-makers, match-makers! I'm sick—sick and disgusted!''

And she burst into tears.

XXVI

A neighbor told Mira of several brilliant matches for which a Rabbi Fishbein was responsible. She recommended him highly. Mira dropped hints about him to Gussie. Soon a tacit understanding that Mira would consult this rabbi sprang up between her and Gussie.

Gussie felt humiliated. She knew she was as pretty as any of the girls of her acquaintance who had found men without a match-maker's aid, and she felt that the fates were treating her badly. She went about with a preoccupied and hurt air. At times she shed tears.

Her daughter's distress did not daunt Mira. She told herself that Gussie was a fool, and to listen to her objections one would have to be an even greater fool. She was the mother, and she was wiser; she would find a good man for Gussie and later Gussie would be grateful enough.

While Mira went about thus musing, she resolutely put the home into shape for the coming event. She jerked things out of one corner, put them in another; she polished, swept; she covered defects in all sorts of ways. In her manner was

happy expectancy and an alertness for criticism. There was something in Yekel's glances that told her he disapproved, and there was the sting of Annie's outburst. But Mira felt strong enough to overcome all obstacles. Her tiny blue eyes shot sparks now at Yekel, now at Annie; it was as if she were telling them to remember that it was *she* whom they had to deal with and that they would have to get up very early in the morning indeed to match her wits. Now and then she felt a martyr under their disapproving glances, for was she not thinking of Gussie's best welfare? At such moments she leaned on God, and then she soon returned to her state of happy expectancy.

At last the house was in order, and Gussie was the richer by a shirt waist and skirt, indispensible requisites as Mira thought, should the rabbi choose to make a preliminary visit of inspection.

But as it happened, Rabbi Fishbein dispensed with this custom of his in the case of Gussie Cohen. It turned out that he had known Mira as a child, that she had sat on his knee, and that he had been struck by her precociousness, her sharp tongue, her keen wits. He had recognized her resemblance to her mother and had questioned her as to her birthplace. Rabbi Fishbein was delighted to meet her again. Mira came away from him with the promise that he would find for her Gussie "de nicest yung men in de hul Nev York."

XXVII

A greatly excited Mira arrived home. She could scarcely wait for the day to end, so eager was she to tell Gussie of what had happened. She went about the house more noisily than ever. Though she was tempted time and again to confide in Annie, she didn't. Something told her not to.

A scarlet patch on each of her cheeks and her glistening eyes gave her an air of secrecy. Annie called out to her:

"Mama, what makes you so excited to-day?"

Mira hesitated a moment; then it was as if a leash had been slipped from her tongue: "What are you talking about," she cried, nudging Annie with her elbow. And she proceeded to tell all the story.

Having told, Mira's self-confidence suddenly left her. "Ennele," she said, tears of supplication in her eyes, "you said 'Match-makers!' 'Match-makers!' the other night; you made fun of me. And you and your father both look as if you would like to stab a knife in me. I had a hard enough time to get Gussie to agree; don't influence her against a match-maker." With touching eloquence, Mira proceeded to set forth the value of marrying off Gussie. Was she to work in a shop for the rest of her life? And what was to be the outcome of years of shop work but premature old age, and disease? And who was to

say that a home and a good husband were not better than these, no matter by what means they were acquired?

Annie had no clear idea of the meaning of marriage; match-making, therefore, did not really appear coarse to her. Her disapproval had begun with Mira's nagging and at first had been confined to that. It was only recently that her disapproval had taken on another quality, a quality she did not herself understand, except that in a vague but impressive way it came to her through her father's glances. Often when Mira cajoled Gussie, Yekel glancing at Annie seemed to tangle her thoughts and rob her of volition; he seemed to draw her to him and, against her will, make her think match-making objectionable, her mother coarse.

Now, as Mira spoke, Annie felt herself shedding her father's dominance, and going over sympathetically to her mother. Yet it was with the greatest reluctance that she agreed to refrain from influencing Gussie. Even so, she felt the next moment as if she had been disloyal to something good in herself, and with that feeling her father was somehow mingled.

XXVIII

Annie was in the parlor, asleep on the lounge, when Gussie came home from work. In spite of Annie's promise to cooperate, Mira was exceed-

ingly glad she had the way clear of her for the immediate present; she felt she would do better with Gussie alone. At once her wits began working at high speed, devising a way of approaching the subject. In a moment she had the whole plan in her mind. The introductory sentence was on the tip of her tongue when Gussie greatly astonished her by sinking into a chair and beginning to cry.

"What is it, see Gussele? What is it?" Mira was alarmed; she felt frustrated, disheartened.

She was not feeling very well, said Gussie, and she was unhappy; she wanted to be let alone. Would Mira mind if she went and lay down on the bed in the bedroom until supper time?

"Nu, sure, nu, sure, lie down," said Mira, feeling the keenest disappointment. She herself led Gussie to the bed, tucking her in under Yekel's discarded winter coat, with its rusty cotton threads where the buttons had once been.

When Gussie seemed calm, Mira went back to the kitchen to finish her preparations for supper, feeling that the fates had set themselves against her, even doubting God's loyalty. Under the disappointment her enthusiasm ebbed, her self-confidence waned. Not only did she say nothing to Gussie that evening, but she managed to whisper a warning in Annie's ear: "Keep it a secret from Gussie—from your father too, and Libbie." Delivering herself of this, Mira happened to

catch Yekel's glance. A spirit of defiance seized her. She colored under it, and felt a momentary anger against Gussie, the unwitting cause of all these complications.

As the evening wore on, Mira's mind rejected all fears and doubts, and her heart rejected all complicated feelings. She reached a single, all-inclusive idea and intention: Yekel had to be bullied into agreement with her. It was as if by bullying him into agreement she could shut out the will of fate, and Gussie's sensitiveness, and everything else that could arise to frustrate her plans. She could no longer stand Yekel's unspoken objections hammering against her purpose. It was as if he had weakened her intention to tell Gussie, and was responsible for Gussie's tears. Mira resolved to have it "out" with Yekel as she had had it "out" with Annie.

In bed that night, with Yekel beside her on the opposite slope, Mira in her mind poured indignation on Yekel, as if he had actually expressed the opposition she felt in him. What right had he to object to plans of hers for the happiness of their daughter, when he had never been concerned about her unhappiness? Did he ever consider that Gussie had to slave in a shop? No, he did not; all he considered was his drink; he needed whiskey and got it; that was the beginning and end of his existence; no, not that alone—he had also to have children, children, children

without end. A lot of the pain and responsibility of it *he* had borne. A father! . . . She worked herself up mentally to such a pitch of indignation and contempt that, regardless of the fact that Yekel was already half asleep, she whispered out to him in a hard, defensive tone, "Listen, I'm getting a *shadchen* for Gussie."

The sudden booming—as it seemed to Yekel—of her voice against his sleepy ear startled him. In a thick voice he cried out a sudden, guttural "Hah?"

Mira was annoyed. A hot flush went over her. "I'm talking about your oldest daughter, father; rub out your ears a little, and hear," she snapped.

Yekel was quite awake by now, but he was unable to fasten his mind on what Mira was saying.

"Do you hear me?" cried Mira in a shrill though low voice.

Yekel heard her well enough, so he said "Yes," as if in surprise.

"Nu?" asked she.

"What?" said Yekel. He and Mira never talked at night in bed. What could she want?

"I said," repeated Mira emphatically, "I am getting a *shadchen* for Gussie."

Yekel could neither distinctly place Gussie just at that moment, nor could he, in his sleepiness, see anything momentous in getting a *shadchen* for her. He made no answer.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked Mira, feeling some relief.

"Say?" said Yekel.

"Yes," said Mira.

Something made Yekel answer, "Ask Gussie."

Mira took it that he meant that if Gussie did not object, he did not object. She said nothing more. Her relief was great. For a long time she lay reflecting on how one person can misunderstand another; her husband, after all, wasn't so bad; he did think of more than Annie; for all she knew, Yekel himself had perhaps thought of a *shadchen* for his eldest daughter. And how readily Annie had agreed to cooperate! Yes, Mira told herself, people misunderstand each other horribly; she had been stupidly concerned.

And while Mira lay thinking kindly and feeling relief, full consciousness had come upon Yekel and he, too, lay thinking of match-making. To turn any woman over to any man, so long as he came with a guarantee that he made enough money to support her! How was it, he wondered sadly, that the Miras of the world had so little need for romance, while others of the same world starved for it? The question left him rueful, troubled and confused.

XXIX

The days dragged.

Annie was gaining strength very slowly, and

she had nothing to do in the long days, nothing to look forward to. She grieved terribly over Nina. She missed her now more than ever. The thought of Doctor Ellis was a constant pain; even blaming her father did not help. She felt adrift, deserted, lonely, unhappy.

Yekel, watching Annie out of the corners of troubled eyes, felt the days drag for him too. George Ellis was no longer there to deprive him of his better reason, and he was conscious not of himself but only of Annie.

Had he not, by driving Doctor Ellis away, deprived Annie of her only impetus toward a full recovery? The question weighed on him until it hurt. Had he not defeated his own best ends as well, for what did he want more than to see Annie herself again?

Yekel felt himself to be a terrible failure; all his devotion toward Annie during her illness had been a farce, his very love for her a sort of fraud. He hated himself; a thousand times he told himself he would go back to drink and as many times he used an iron will to keep himself from doing so, with not the least feeling of satisfaction over his victory, but rather contempt for himself. He kept sober without wanting to; he loved and did harm to his beloved; he had nothing to give, yet he aspired to fill the place of one who had everything to give. He felt mean now before a mental vision of Doctor

Ellis, and ashamed, and contrite toward Annie. The days dragged unmercifully for him.

For Mira the days dragged because she did not hear from Rabbi Fishbein. Three weeks had passed with no word. And in all this time she had not told Gussie of her visit with Rabbi Fishbein, having finally decided, in the face of Gussie's break-down, that it would be wiser to wait until she had some definite word. She had a superstition that one could *kill* chickens by counting them before they were hatched. But she wanted very much to tell Gussie, and so the days dragged through her enforced silence. She began to fear that Rabbi Fishbein would fail her.

Then came word from the *shadchen.* He had *found* the "nicest yung man in de hul Nev York."

XXX

It was right after supper. Annie was sitting at the table working out problems in arithmetic. Yekel, his eyes caught by a headline in the newspaper about a miners' strike to end which the government had called out the militia, forgot to follow his custom of slipping away to the parlor immediately after the meal. He picked up the newspaper and began eagerly reading the account, indignation against government interference between capital and labor rising higher and higher in him as he read.

Annie glancing up now and then, catching his expression, wondered what it was he was reading that kept his face so distraught. Kinder feelings than she had known for him in a long while flickered in her heart. Her health was very much improved, and she was happily looking forward to release from her housebound condition; to-morrow she was going back to school! Perhaps these had something to do with her kinder feelings toward her father.

The thought popped into her head that she had hardly noticed him at all since the times when he sat by her bedside tending her so devotedly. She felt a little contrite. After that she could not concentrate on her arithmetic. She sat drawing hieroglyphics, remembering the things her father had done for her, how he had fed her little bits of ice, how he had covered her and uncovered her as her fever rose and fell, how he had sat stroking her hand. He had been very kind, she told herself, and she wondered what he must have felt when she seemed to forget all about him as soon as she was better. She remembered the night of Nina's death, her father's pain when he had thought it was she who was dead. Her heart went out with yearning for Nina, ached a bit with a need for Doctor Ellis, and came back to Yekel. She glanced up at him again. He was still immersed in his newspaper, and the lines on his face were deeper than before.

Libbie who sat reading in a far corner of the room, coughed and interrupted Annie's train of thought. Yekel glanced up from his newspaper, looked down again immediately. His face was now clear of lines. The thought flew through Annie's mind that she was a fool to feel contrite toward him; had he not sent Doctor Ellis away rudely? How could he have done such a thing when he knew how much Doctor Ellis meant to her? He had been jealous, just plain jealous, that's what he had been—and she felt contempt for her father. The thought that her father had been jealous was new and startling; her mind dwelt on it.

Gussie, who had come home from work late, and was only now finishing her supper, pushed back her chair from the table preparatory to rising. Mira who had stood silently watching the coffee on the stove, that it might not boil over, cried:

"Wait Gussie, you have not had your coffee yet."

"I don't want any coffee," said Gussie shortly, as she rose.

This unusual behavior of the usually docile Gussie alarmed Mira. For goodness sake, cried her inner self, was that girl going off at a temperamental tangent again? Mira, having Rabbi Fishbein's word, was resolved to break the news to Gussie to-night, without fail. She could not

bear the thought of further delay. In her shrill voice, become shriller from her nervous tension, she urged, "But you always drink coffee." Just then she caught sight of Gussie's plate, on which lay most of her food untouched. "Did you ever in your life see this?" she cried. "You have eaten *nothing!*" She stopped, as if suddenly turned dumb. Then speech returned to her. Coffee-pot in hand, she advanced to the middle of the room and blurted out, careless of the presence of others, "Now is no time to starve yourself. You want to be reduced to skin and bones? In the way corpses eat, so they look. Girls who look like corpses men don't marry. Rabbi Fishbein has a man—a nice young man, respectable—with a lot of money—a *nice* young man. Rabbi Fishbein described my daughter to him as plump and rosy-cheeked."

Everyone was looking up questioningly at her as she stood there, her cheap black cotton waist a little too big for her, her black brilliantine skirt, that had fitted her snugly before the tragedy of little Nina, now hanging loose. She looked pathetic in her eagerness.

Yekel rose and clumped out of the room, into the parlor, feeling sorry for Mira, and experiencing an odd sense of ownership in his daughter Gussie that he had never felt before.

Soon Annie followed him, but she stopped in the bedroom, and lay down on the bed. The

whole world seemed upside-down; she felt disgust, enigmatical disgust, and she felt pity and regret, loss and need, yearning and loneliness, without any idea to whom or to what to attach each of these emotions. One thing she knew clearly, and that was that somehow, in some way, a change would come, that things would not go on as they were.

XXXI

Later in the evening, when Mira had concluded her talk with Gussie, and Gussie was well won around to her mother's practical philosophy, they sat, chairs close together, talking about things in general.

"For Annie," said Gussie a little tearfully, "you won't need to get a match-maker. Pretty as she is, and a colnege lady as she will be, her husband will seek *her* out."

Said Mira loyally, "If she will be a colnege lady it's because you work in a shop to support her; and if you think she looks down on you for having a match made for you, you make a big mistake. She said the other day. . . ." And Mira gave her imagination full swing. From the things she reported Annie to have said the other day, Gussie could not help drawing the conclusion that not alone did Annie approve, but she had quite inspired her mother to take the match-making step. Gussie was pleased. She had a

peculiar regard for Annie, a deep respect. Was not Annie an American girl, while Gussie was still foreign, and would always remain so? Gussie's sense of degradation dropped entirely from her. Her good heart swelled with kind and grateful emotions. "How beautiful Annie has grown," she mused in her softest voice, "since she has been getting better. She is developing, too, getting fatter, and her eyes, aren't they lovely? So much goodness and wisdom in them. She is a sister and a daughter to be proud of."

Inspired by Gussie, Mira's wifely and maternal pride took fire: "Oh," she cried glowingly, "*our Annie!* A prize she is; she has sense, beauty; she is——" Mira bent over as if to impart a great secret, "*like her father;* says little, but thinks a lot. What do you suppose, your father is a fool? Your mother would not have married a fool. Down at bottom, your father is a whole philosopher; and Annie is the same. She is *like* her father—smart, learned. God bless her and keep her well." Then, "And now, Gussie, in a few days he is coming, your suitor. Eat a lot till then, sleep, don't worry, and look your best."

"All right," said Gussie, modestly dropping her eyes.

XXXII

The next few days, Mira's bustling filled the

house. She had aroused the neighbors almost to her own pitch of excitement, and time and again the door would open without any preliminary knocking, upon one or another of them who came to inquire if Mira needed a little of this, or a little of that and, incidentally, to pry into the progress Mira had made in her preparations, the preparations consisting in another complete overhauling of the room-of-all-affairs, and in baking.

The confusion drove Yekel and Annie into themselves and involuntarily toward each other. Without knowing it, each felt sorry for the other.

XXXIII

Gala Sabbath though it was not, Mira was preparing the gala Jewish meal—chicken soup, chicken, *gefülte fish, comput,* tea and *keechlech.* For this was the day of days. Rabbi Fishbein and Joshua Levine were coming.

According to Rabbi Fishbein's report, Joshua Levine, the "nicest yung men in the hul Nev York," was part-owner of a butcher shop, with a clear thousand dollars in the bank, in his own name.

Mira was excitedly working over the evening meal. She so wanted everything to taste particularly good that nothing, as she tasted it, quite suited her, and she strove, by adding flavorings of one sort and another, to make improvements.

Scarlet patches broke out over her face and neck as she worried, all over again, about Yekel and Annie. Would they really cooperate? Would Yekel be friendly, or would he maintain his eternal silence? Would Annie show her learning and be a credit to the family? And Libbie must be told to control her sniffling and her coughing. Now, if Benjamin had not run away from home—she changed her mind and told herself that it was well he did run away, for he stuttered, and a stutterer reflected no glory. Mira sighed as she wondered where her boy was. Two years ago he had disappeared as completely as if he had sunk into the earth. But he was safe, she told herself, doubtless working on some farm, for after he had gone she had found a stack of farm literature hidden away in a box in the closet, with his pencil marks on it.

Thoughts of Benjamin recalled poor little Nina and, in succession, each of Mira's other children who had died. . . . Mingled with Mira's happy emotions were sad ones enough, and under them she grew ever more afraid of the possibility of Yekel and Annie failing her in this, her chief attempt to gain a little joy for all of them. Although Gussie's marriage would cut off the family's source of income, Mira could think of marriage for Gussie only as a blessing to them all. Mira trusted to fate to bring another source of income; she was sure it would. Would

she could be so sure of Yekel's gentlemanliness this evening, and Annie's friendliness, she told herself. There was no other source of income, of course, excepting Yekel. "He will continue to keep sober, and bring home his wages," she told herself, as if by the thought she could flatter Yekel, and by the flattery encourage him. Yet though she thought this, she experienced momentary fright. Maybe this *very night,* for spite, Yekel would come home drunk! The thought held her for one terrible moment, then she rejected it. It would not happen. It could not.

Presently Yekel came home, quite sober. Mira out of deep gratitude broke a precedent; she spoke to him. She asked him to wash himself and to brush his clothes. Yekel was well aware of the occasion; the last thing he cared to do was to appear a party to it, but he did as Mira asked, for he did not want to rouse her anger; he could not endure the thought of her voice rising shrilly; and also he was sorry for her; he disliked her, but he was sorry for her; he was disgusted with her, but he was sorry for her. She was unfortunate, he told himself, in having a man so different from herself for a husband.

Gussie, with rings under her eyes, pale and looking rueful, came home soon after Yekel, and, immediately afterwards, Annie returned.

"Ennele," pleaded Mira, "go help Gussie to

get fixed up. Fix her hair nice and help her put on her new waist and skirt. Pull her waist down snug all around. Make her look nice.''

Annie's reaction was the same as her father's. She was disgusted with her mother, and sorry for her. She went and helped Gussie primp.

XXXIV

Joshua Levine: a gaunt gentleman, pale faced, with rather high cheek bones, a strong chin, and earnest gray eyes, bespectacled.

Rabbi Fishbein: an abbreviated person, clad in new black brilliantine, a little baggy; with an imposing long white beard, small, red-rimmed dark eyes, and a flat, spreading nose that emitted staccato noises into a bandanna handkerchief every few minutes.

These two gathered with the Cohen family about the table in the room-of-all-affairs, spread with a table cloth a little too blue, and covered with good things to eat, steaming hot.

''Oigh,'' cried Mira with false timidity, ''*just* to-day the fish isn't so good.''

''Not good?'' cried Joshua Levine in response, casting furtive glances at the prospective bride. ''It is so very good, I feel like licking my fingers.''

The gratified Mira beamed, but added, still timidly, ''But Gussie, long life on her, makes it much better. You should taste *her* cooking.

She's a better cook than her mother a thousand times."

The lie received its due and appreciative notice as a truth on the part of Joshua Levine, who said nothing in reply, busying himself with his food. Gussie had her first opportunity to look him over. His appearance pleased her, was, in fact, close to her ideal. Her heart fluttered.

Meanwhile Yekel and Annie were squirming in their seats. They felt the weight of Mira's expectation that they enter into the spirit of the dinner with friendliness. Yekel did not want to, and Annie could not. Annie was racking her brain for something to do or say; Yekel was withdrawing farther and farther into himself, hating the situation, determined to leave the table at the first opportunity. Joshua Levine irritated him, and Rabbi Fishbein looked to him like an owl, the pity of it being that he was not asleep.

Said Joshua in very wise fashion, after a self-conscious cough, "Cooking is a very important asset in a woman. It should be the chief ambition of her life."

Yekel was seized with an impulse to protect Gussie. He wanted to snatch her up bodily and rush off with her, away from this creature who had such opinions. He gave Joshua a dark, furtive glance which Mira caught, and which sent her blood rushing through her veins. "Will you have some more soup?" she interjected hastily,

holding out her hand for Rabbi Fishbein's plate.

Rabbi Fishbein fluttered his eyelids, bent slightly forward, and made a courteous refusal with five widely spread fingers of one hand and a mild shaking of the head. "It's very good," he said with dignified obsequiousness, "but I've had enough." He blew his nose in his immense handkerchief.

"You?" Mira turned to Joshua. Joshua looked at his plate, and then over at the platter of chicken. He almost said "Yes" when he realized there was much more on the bill of fare. "No, thanks," he said. He turned to Yekel, about whose silence he was a little curious, and upon whom he wanted somehow to make an impression. Besides, shrewdly observant as he was, he had noticed a copy of the Yiddish *Forwarts* on a chair the moment he had entered the home, and the interrogation had leaped into his mind, "Who's the socialist around here?" Joshua objected to socialism. His idea of a socialist was a disgruntled human being; he hoped it was Yekel rather than Gussie who was thus infected.

"Have you been reading about the miners' strike?" he asked, affecting the German pronunciation of some of the Yiddish, and assuming what he felt was an air of importance. He glanced at Gussie as if to say that this was an affair between men; women were out of it. Attracted by Gussie's round hips and full bosom, and by

her womanliness, he wanted to make a good impression.

Yekel directly addressed had to make an answer. He wanted to be civil, but the word "Yes" fell curtly from his lips.

Joshua was not daunted. "I suppose," he said, "you are in sympathy with the strikers?" His face wore a supercilious smile.

"Yes," replied Yekel, again curtly, shifting uneasily in his chair.

A great relief. Joshua glanced approvingly at Gussie. He now addressed himself to the company in general.

"That is just the trouble with our people here in America," he declaimed, "they get spoiled. The good times they have here spoil them." He flushed from real indignation and continued hotly, "Who makes possible the good times for the workers if not the bosses? The bosses give them jobs. Without bosses they would have no jobs, and no wages, and without wages they would starve. Is it a man's fault if he is smart enough to be a boss? It takes brains to be a boss. What do these workers want anyway? They have no brains. They ought to be sent back to Russia where they would have to fear a czar, and pogroms, and eat hay like horses, and work like horses too. Here in America——" He broke off. In a more indulgent tone he resumed after a moment: "Well some people are like dogs—you

do them a favor and they bark at you. For my part I say Three Cheers for the Bosses!"

Annie saw her father's face flush. "You see you are a boss," he said shortly, surprising himself as much as anybody.

"So I am," boasted Joshua, expanding his chest importantly. "I, too, worked for others when I first came to this country. It was harder than death. The bosses squeezed you to skin and bone. But I made up my mind to become my own boss. I slaved, I starved, I saved. I went into business for myself when I had a little money. That is the real beauty of America; if you are a real person you have your chance; you don't have to stick in the mud."

Annie cast her eyes toward her mother and Gussie.

How profoundly impressed they looked! Glancing from them to her father, who seemed terribly annoyed, she had a feeling of helplessness as if she were a cork upon water, tossed hither and thither. As for the bosses, and strikers, and a chance in America—she did not know what to think; she only wondered. Then Yekel spoke again.

"Real person," he said reflectively, as if to himself. A look of pain was in his eyes.

"Yes, a real person in America has a chance," quickly interjected Joshua Levine.

Yekel remained silent a moment. Slowly he

brought his glance to meet his opponent's. "Real person?" he repeated. And then suddenly, like a hurricane, there swept over him a sense of all idealism in the world outraged, insulted. Who were these Joshua Levines that they dared take it upon themselves to say who the real people of the world were? What did they know about it?

Indignation released his tongue.

"You," he said, "you think there is only one kind of real person—a money-maker, a boss." His voice was hoarse. He paused. His eyes searching Joshua through, he continued: "A real person—the heart makes the real person—the soul. A real person? That is he who feels with the heart, who knows with the soul, who——" He broke off abruptly, with a short mirthless laugh. He lapsed into a drunken manner, bending forward loosely, and added as if confidentially, "Real person? Why, you know nothing about it." In a flash his inarticulate self took possession of Yekel again.

He glanced awkwardly about him, and cowered back in his chair, oppressed at the sight of what seemed a host of people. He wanted to flee.

Annie, watching her father, felt herself confused as to his identity. He seemed to be not himself, but Doctor Ellis, wonderful and approachable. Heart—soul—these struck familiar chords. Doctor Ellis had told her that the soul was in the heart and was that part of a person that

loves the good and the beautiful. Then her father, too, knew that? He knew what Doctor Ellis knew? Looking at Yekel now, Annie was certain that he did, that Yekel knew more, *was* more than Doctor Ellis.

A palpitating eagerness to know her father seized her.

Questions began to burn on her tongue. She wanted to ask her father whether—Oh, it wasn't only one thing she wanted to ask him—she wanted to ask him *everything*. She would. She was about to speak when Yekel rose abruptly and in a dead silence left the table.

Everyone seemed as startled as Annie.

Joshua was the first to come back to himself. He was pleased that Mira and Gussie were chagrined; it showed them to be sensitive, as women should be.

"Now," he said breezily, addressing them both, "cheer up, cheer up. What's a little queerness in a father? Nothing. Nothing at all. A person is responsible only for himself. I am broad-minded and liberal." He felt a hero.

Though Mira was cheered by this show of generosity, she scarcely dared hope for the best. It was one thing to say an ill-natured father didn't matter, and another thing to be willing to take such a father for one's own.

Never was there a more surprised woman than Mira when, the next morning, Rabbi Fishbein

came to tell her that Joshua Levine was willing to take Gussie *"wie zie shtayt un gayt,"* (without goods and effects), so much did he like her.

XXXV

Annie, hearing the announcement, felt a swift return of her former disgust. But it was only momentary and belonged, it seemed, in some other world; a world she had left the night before when her father had spoken to Joshua Levine. All night long she had lain awake, cherishing in her heart that one quick glimpse she had caught of the man who was her father. Henceforth Doctor Ellis was no more. Before her now opened a new world, a world upon which the sun had just risen, and into which she must go to seek the soul of Yekel, her father.

BOOK THREE

XXXVI

WHEN Annie reached the point of considering means by which to make friends with her silent, brooding father, a sense of the immense difficulty of the undertaking made her heart fail. From the time Annie could remember, her father had been a silent and disregarded figure in the home. No one spoke to him, he spoke to no one, and he came and went without rousing any interest in anyone. How, suddenly, make overtures to him? Annie felt the need of help. At last she decided to invoke the aid of her sister Libbie. She doubted Libbie's usefulness, she did not know why, but her need of an ally was compelling.

One warm afternoon, on her return from school, she invited Libbie to come and sit with her on the fire-escape. She had something "private" to talk about. Privacy in the home was an impossibility, and the streets were too crowded, dirty and heat laden.

The fire-escape, so called for want of a better name, was a slip of stone considerably wider than

a sill, outside the parlor window, decorated with an iron rod on either side. For what purpose the parlor window was so endowed must forever remain a mystery. It connected with nothing, led nowhere, had no visible function to perform.

As the Cohens lived two stories heavenward, and a fall into an air shaft, even if padded with many kinds of refuse, was not without hazard, the girls sat—the upper half of them out, the lower half within—each leaning against an iron rod.

"Wha' je wan'a tell me?" Libbie was curious.

"About papa."

"About papa?"

Libbie had a way of lifting her reddish brows with the upward inflection of her voice. She was not an attractive child, with her eternal restlessness; she was never still. Just now she was smoothing the stone fringe with her hand, and sniffling.

Seated beside her sister, Annie appeared in sharp contrast. Everything about her bespoke individuality. Her brooding blue eyes seemed to open upon a labyrinth of soul.

"Yes, about papa. I think we are getting old enough so we should feel responsible for the way he is and the way he treats us."

Libbie, perplexed, asked, "So what?"

A pause, vibrant with Annie's suppressed eagerness. "So this——" She drew closer to her

sister. "I think we ought to ask him what the pieces are that he plays on his violin, and ask him to tell us the stories. We could get him talking that way. He goes now Saturday afternoons to Seward Park to listen to the band. Maybe, if we asked him, he'd take us along, and he'd know we were interested in things he likes. Anyway, we ought to do something, and we don't do anything. We hardly know him. He's like a stranger in our house. It's terrible." These were the thoughts that had mellowed in her mind.

Libbie was a little too astonished to be altogether impressed. But gradually Annie's earnestness won her over.

"I'm willing to try," she said.

"Oh, are you?" cried Annie anxiously. Then, "We'll begin to-night. At supper we'll ask—we'll ask him what paper he reads, if it is the *Tageblatt* or the *Forwarts*. When he goes in to play, we'll begin by telling him what piece we like best. You know, and little by little we'll get him used to us. That's it. Used to us. He doesn't seem used to us."

The sisters looked into each other's eyes. Libbie was the first to turn hers away. "Ain't it different in our house than in other houses?" she said, and reflectively added, "Papa and mama are like strangers, and all of us and papa." She shrugged.

"It don't have to be," said Annie. "We can

make mama different too. If mama were different, papa might like her.''

''Doesn't he like her?'' Libbie turned with astonishment upon her sister.

''Like her? No, he doesn't. He doesn't like her at all. She annoys him. That's why he avoids her.''

Libbie burst out, ''Gosh, then I don't know. He didn't have to marry her. I don't know at all. I don't understand him. He's funny.'' She was all at sea in this world.

''Neither do I know,'' answered Annie. ''Let's find out.''

''All right, let's.''

XXXVII

But it did not work at all. When Annie questioned Yekel as to the paper he read, he ignored her. When she asked him a second time, he finally mumbled some unintelligible answer. After this he assumed a forbidding expression on his face, which did not leave him for the remainder of the supper period.

So the girls, by a wink, agreed that one question was enough for a beginning, and deferred musical discussion.

And Yekel, when he was undressing for bed, stopped when he had taken off his suspenders, to stare absently into space. Over and over again

Annie's voice sounded in his mind, "Papa, what paper do you read?"

His irresolution finally got on Mira's nerves. Tucked away on her slope of the bed, she was anxious to close her eyes and go to sleep. The gaslight, dim as it was, made sleep impossible.

"Nu, what are you dreaming about?" she cried, "come to sleep."

XXXVIII

All next day Annie's plaintive question echoed in Yekel's mind, and disturbed him. Though he felt behind her overture something new and good, he shrank from it. He did not have the spirit now to go out in answer, he told himself. Had Annie not turned away from him to Doctor Ellis, he meditated, it would have been different, for so much of his reserve had already been broken down. Now it was a matter of beginning all over again, a thing he couldn't do.

As he sat in the sweat shop ruminating in this vein, he was so conscious of the lurking disapproval in Feifa Teitelbaum's eyes that every little while, with an earnest effort, he roused himself out of his abstraction, his heart beating heavily within him. When night came he was exhausted. He sat down to supper, his nerves distraught, earnestly hoping that Annie would "leave him alone."

Annie sensed his agitation. She managed to

convey a meaning sign to Libbie, and neither attempted to make conversation.

Immediately after supper, Yekel mechanically picked up his hat and went out of the house.

Some time later he was seated in a corner of the old Brooklyn Bridge. For all that people passed and traffic, the bridge had an aspect of being deserted. It had an air of brooding about it, an air of ominous slumber. The light, picking out the black splotches of dirt on the pavement, slanted unpromisingly away. The torpid water below lapped languidly against the mossy buoys.

Vague memories of babbling brooks came back to Yekel as he sat abstractedly staring down into the river. A restlessness came over him. It was not until then that he knew he was battling with his craving for drink, that it was more intense now than it had been at any time since Nina's death and Annie's illness. All day it had been stirring in him like a sleepy beast, though he had ignored it.

He frowned darkly. He bit his lower lip until it hurt. . . . Sparrows chirped past, close to him. A fleeting, exquisite emotion, like the sweep of the bow over the strings of a violin, a vague nostalgia, passed over Yekel's heart, and left him feeling heavy. Through half shut eyes he watched the languid stir of the water, listening to its "tlick, tlick" against the buoys. Was the water's

eternal stir, he wondered, from a restlessness such as man's? Somewhere in its watery bulk had it perhaps a heart? He felt a sudden impatience with himself and abruptly shifted his position. Thought and feeling, what were they? Dead things, he told himself, to which only action gave life. All his life he had spent on dead things—— dead things——

A voice in his ear interrupted his brooding. . . . Annie saying: "Papa, what paper do you read?" Yekel straightened up and smiled wistfully. . . . The desire for drink leaped up again sharp and sudden, like a flame, and died down as suddenly, for someone was whispering to him very plainly that Annie longed to lead him into a new and better life and that he ought to go. . . . A choking sensation seized his throat. He *knew* that Annie had this ambition for him, he managed to answer back. He paused and looked about him. The fact that no one was in sight seemed to alarm him. "I guess I know what my own child wants to do for me," he whispered with bravado as if to someone present, "and—and—*sure* I'll let her."

Mocked the turbid water below: "Drunkard! Drunkard!"

Yekel felt ashamed and then an angry heat broke over him. With a sudden swift movement he leaned far over the low stone wall. "Shut up!" he hissed, and began to think about Annie again.

He now felt a keen victory in her coming over to him from Doctor Ellis. There was a swift shifting of the scenery. He was in Feifa Teitelbaum's shop, shoulders stooped over a heavyweight coat, and it was years ago. "What will happen when she first understands her father is a drunkard?" he was wondering. He came back to the present and recalled Annie's eyes when first she had understood he was a drunkard, and how he had longed to coax away, bit by bit, the bitter welling of pain in them. He went back again to the past and remembered how he had told himself that he must never expect other than words of censure from her. The more wonderful seemed her question: "Papa, what paper do you read?" Recalling the few simple words now, the soul of Yekel's fatherhood came out in his eyes; he felt proud, glad, triumphant.

The water below seemed to burst into scornful laughter. Yekel's heart gave an anguished jump, then filled with shame. He cast a sort of homeless look about him. The craving for drink rushed upon him like something alive. He paused, terrified. He could not fail Annie, he told himself, he would not. His breath came thick. His soul seemed suspended.

Then up to Yekel's lips a woman's white hand lifted a tumbler. . . . Yekel shut his eyes. . . .

Before his inner vision a brood of chicks passed slowly by, digging in the earth for sustenance.

Now one, now another picked up its feed, and all of them together went on their patient, spasmodic search. From somewhere came the smell of new-mown hay.

A flash of things absurdly, unreasonably irrelevant. Snow. A howling wind. An inn. . . . Yekel drank eagerly.

His head dropped upon his breast. A sigh of defeat rose from the depths of his being.

Hours later, the point of a policeman's club lightly resting upon the top of Yekel's head woke him up. He rose and, without memory, lumbered away.

XXXIX

Annie and Libbie said very little to each other until it was eleven o'clock and their father had not yet come home.

"Gosh," then remarked Annie in a whisper, as she and Libbie, in their task of laying out the proper bedding for the numerous beds, collided at the parlor door, "if he comes home drunk now it will be like—spite work." Her young face looked blanched in the sickly gaslight.

"It would spoil everything," concurred Libbie.

Then each with her burden of bedding that strained at the flabby muscles of her arm, turned on her way.

When they met again on the second round, Annie whispered, "We won't be able to talk here.

Let's go out after a while in the hall, in the water-closet to talk."

"All right, let's," answered Libbie.

Ten minutes later they were in the cubby-hole of half rotted wood, and Annie was saying, "I feel so miserable."

"No use feeling miserable," replied Libbie, knocking her foot lightly against the door.

"I'm miserable, and scared, too," continued Annie, as if to herself. She added, "I wish we had tried to get closer to papa sooner."

"But you were sick," said Libbie, biting her finger nails.

"Yes, but there was time before then."

"Before? You—maybe you didn't think of it. You were too young." Libbie was unconsciously repeating what Annie had once said.

"Only a little over six months younger.

Libbie kept her eyes upon her sister's face a moment, scrutinizingly.

"You know," she remarked, apropos of nothing, apparently, "you've changed an awful lot since you were sick."

"I have? How?" asked Annie. She was taken aback by her sister's shrewd observation; Annie had made an effort to hide the change that had taken place in her.

"I don't know," said Libbie, "kind of—like you feel more important."

Annie started.

Libbie continued, "I don't know just how to say so. Sometimes I think you feel better than us." Libbie didn't really think that, but she was paving the way to a worming out of confidences, and also letting out a thought or two that had been with her for a long time. She continued, keeping cautiously observant, "With a grand man like Doctor Ellis who was friendly with you and everything—you could easy get stuck up. Why not?" She was ever so eager to hear the reply.

Annie become electrically aware of the inquisitiveness and suspicion lurking behind her more worldly sister's words. "Oh, no, not stuck up," she answered impotently.

Libbie smiled knowingly. "Gee, not any more," she cried. "Why ought you to be? He's out of love with you now, easy seen."

Annie's eyelids fell several times in quick succession. Swiftly she recalled the smiling, meaning glances that used to fall from Libbie upon her when she and Doctor Ellis sat together. Those glances now revealed to her their full measure of derision. So Libbie had thought she was in love with Doctor Ellis! Annie knew in what contempt Libbie held love—it was an evil, leading to greater and greater evil, and a condition to be ashamed of, to blush over.

Annie felt as if a net had closed about her, and she were helpless to extricate herself. At last, "You are mistaken," she said, and a shadowy

vision of the Prince in the fairy-tale Doctor Ellis had read to her floated before her.

Mira poked her red head into the hall. "Tzildern," she called, "kom shlippen." Sometimes Mira spoke English.

The girls came out of their hiding place into the house and parted in silence.

Annie went about making her bed slowly, abstractedly. Then she undressed. At last she got under the covers. She lay staring blankly out of the window. She sighed relief when Gussie turned off the gaslight.

In the darkness Annie's mind and emotions seemed to clear. She was all concerned about her father again; but in a curious fashion Doctor Ellis figured alongside her father like his shadow.

As the hours crept on and Yekel did not come home, Doctor Ellis faded from Annie's mind. She could think only of her father. She was alarmed about him. Where was he? Would he come home drunk?

Elevated trains tore through the nocturnal quiet of Division Street, but Annie did not hear them, so hard was she straining to hear her father's footsteps. And while she lay listening, she wondered if her father guessed her contrition, guessed how she longed to come over to him. She wanted her father, no one but her father; she wanted him with all her heart, all her soul.

She loved him, and him only.

At the height of her emotion, Yekel's heavy, slow step sounded. . . . Annie could tell he was sober. . . . How grateful she was!

XL

The next day was Saturday, and Annie slept soundly until nine o'clock.

She was extremely disappointed to find it was raining, for she had dreamed that she and Libbie had approached her father about accompanying him to Seward Park to listen to the band concert, and that he had agreed with enthusiasm. Immediately after waking up she was taken with the resolution really to ask him; the next moment she had looked out of the window and met her disappointment. She confided her chagrin to Libbie.

"Maybe it'll stop yet," answered Libbie.

Later it cleared up. When Yekel came home from work at midday the sun was shining.

Libbie, glancing at her father's gloomy face, whispered to Annie, "Yeh, catch him say 'Yes' if you ask him. He'll tell you to go to hell, betcha."

Libbie's crassness was chilling. Annie felt her courage slip away and disappear. The pleasant outcome of her dream-question lingered in her mind, and she had imagined herself saying quite

naturally, "Papa, can we go with you to Seward Park?" But now she felt self-conscious.

Mira called the family to dinner. All but Yekel obeyed immediately. He puttered around a few minutes. At last he took his seat. Annie watched him as he ate in silence, his eyes persistently upon his plate. She watched the movements of his bloated, sagging cheeks, and his unsteady hand as he raised each mouthful; she watched him as he chewed, as he breathed, as the muscles around his eyes twitched. The more she watched him, the less courage she had.

At last, in a desperate moment, when Yekel, having finished eating, rubbed the back of his hand over his greasy lips preparatory to rising, she thought, "I'll say it now."

But the storm in her father's eyes as he inadvertently raised them to hers checked her like a sudden slap over the mouth. How unhappy he looked! Veins she had never seen before stood out on his brow and on the back of his hands. The sight of them unnerved her. And she was conscious of Libbie's eyes, with smiling triumph in them, upon her.

Yekel rose and lumbered across the room, the inevitable garter trailing after him on the floor. It flashed upon Annie to tell him to fix his garter and so begin a conversation. After that she would say—

Yekel made the discovery of the trailing garter himself, bent and adjusted it.

A void came into Annie's heart.

The triumph in Libbie's eyes heightened, as the afternoon advanced.

An intuitive sixth sense of Annie's seemed to hover over her father with wings that sought somehow to shield him, as if from Libbie's triumphant smile. But she could not say: "Papa, can we go with you to Seward Park?"

Something in Yekel's eyes as Annie met them again and again finally broke through the obscurity in her mind and gave her full understanding. Her father was battling with his craving for drink. He was not a drunkard at heart; he had become a drunkard because his life was empty, because it held none of the things his nature needed; love, beauty, her father needed these. He had nothing. He was alone in the world; he did not even have anyone to speak to. . . . and she was alone too. Whom did she have—since Nina died? Her mind flitted to Doctor Ellis; a feeling of resentment toward him surged up in her. If it had not been for *him,* she and her father would have been intimate friends by now; and, if that had been the case, her father would not now be struggling with the craving for drink. She knew it; he loved her. Out of love for her he had kept sober all through her illness. It was a mean shame, what Doctor Ellis had done—taken

her away from her father who needed her so, whom she needed.

Yekel stirred, and Annie, in her abstraction, somehow imagined he was going out. All the world for a moment seemed an empty husk, and the next moment loomed up something alive and dangerous, in which one must fight.

"Papa," she blurted out, in a hurried, high voice, "Libbie and I want to go with you to Seward Park. Will you take us?"

Yekel glanced furtively at his love child. A sudden, almost simian old age seemed to cover his face, the muscles of which sagged under the weight of his astonishment. At last he faltered, "Yes," scarcely audibly, "yes." He hardly knew why he had said it, because he really wanted to be alone.

Libbie's mouth opened. She stared. The smile of triumph left her face, but she felt glad.

XLI

The dictionary has it that a park is a piece of ground usually of considerable extent, set apart and maintained for public use in such a way as to afford pleasure to the eye as well as opportunity for open-air recreation. Seward Park ought to have a definition all its own. It is a piece of ground set aside, but it is grimy ground, and upon this grimy ground are set grimy stone and

wooden benches. To afford pleasure to the eye? Its north wing smiles upon Hester Street, and its south upon East Broadway with its unsmiling intellectuals. On the west it is bounded by a line of old men, young men, grimy, smeared, bearded, hawking neckties, shoes, coats, hats. Dusty, dirty, mouldy clothing. Who in the world can want to buy these! From all sides comes a smell of sour pickles, herring and sweat. . . . In the heart of the park, upon the grimy benches huddle men and women, bent, wrinkled, getting their "open-air recreation." Politics, life, the Talmud, scientific and artistic ambitions for grandsons and granddaughters they discuss, these people, who have not known much beside pogroms, poverty, humiliation. . . . For stray cats and dogs that have in some way proven themselves nuisances Seward Park offers a secure refuge. And to a mother with a whooping-cough baby a grimy bench has not seldom been a blessing.

On Saturday afternoons in summer, by the city's benevolence, a brass band, in a pavilion for the purpose, makes music in Seward Park. Like ants out of holes crawl all kinds, all degrees of people to listen.

The grimy ground exudes a sickishness. The heartless sun beats down a relentless heat. Corners of bluish handkerchiefs go constantly over the face to mop away perspiration. Headaches

set in. But they stand on, these people, bent on hearing, learning. They keep score, hum, tap. A few years, and Seward Park graduates these to the top-most tiers of the Metropolitan Opera House.

It was when the third number was being played, and after a silent walk to the park, that Yekel and Annie and Libbie arrived and settled on the fringe of the crowd.

"This is called 'Solveig's Lied,'" whispered Yekel, of his own accord. He was feeling glad now that the girls were with him. But there had been a struggle before he had found the courage to bring these words to his lips. And as if his courage had spent itself with those words, for the rest of the time he stood with his hands in his pockets, his forehead furrowed, his eyes narrowed, silent even during the intermission. At one point his gladness died out. He felt uncomfortable in the strangeness of the situation. What did his children want of him? It was as if his gladness had fluttered its wings too strenuously and was tired.

There was a limpness upon Annie that she could not overcome to make conversation. It was not until they were walking back that she was able to say, "I liked the first piece the best. Did you, papa?" What she liked in Solveig's Lied was that sliding over from melancholy into melancholy-kissed gladness, and she expressed it,

"Because it is gladness and sadness all at the same time, like life. Life mixes you up," she added in a lower voice, reflectively.

"And I liked Old Kentucky Home best because I knew it," laughed Libbie.

Yekel threw Annie a sidewise glance. His heart ached for her. "Will she let it mix her up, life?" he wondered moodily. Then with a sigh, thinking of Libbie, "She is her mother's child, the better for her."

As if from a distance Yekel heard Annie's voice, somewhat tremulous. "Papa, what—what is the story of Solveig's Lied?" She was mustering all her courage, spurred on by a recollection of Libbie's mocking smile.

The question echoed hollowly in Yekel's mind. He did not know the story of Solveig's Lied. Chagrin seized on him. He would go to the library, get a book on music and read up on it, he decided. But why hadn't he done so before? So ashamed did he feel of his ignorance before Annie that he forgot to answer her, and his silence threw her back into her timidity. They walked fully half a dozen blocks before courage to speak again rose in her heart. But this time she did not know what to say.

She wondered whether she ought to repeat the unanswered question. Looking up at her father's profile she could have sworn he was angry. Was it because she had asked him the question? Per-

haps it would be better not to ask it again, nor another. Perhaps he was thinking, and would still answer.

Meanwhile they were close to home and Yekel was mumbling, "Run along, children, I'll come later."

Something of the feeling of a mother stabbed by fear for the child who unexpectedly disappears from her sight rushed upon Annie. She wanted her father to come up-stairs with them. She wanted to ask him to, but, glancing up, she caught his eyes, deep like thunder-clouds. She checked her impulse, abruptly turned her back. The act, slight, unmeaning, so utterly unintended to hurt, stabbed Yekel to the heart. Was she contemptuous of her father because he was ignorant and could not answer questions, and was she going back, away from him, to someone else—Doctor Ellis—another, a more enlightened stranger? Jealousy again seized him. Now Yekel wanted Annie. Passionate welcome to her advances rose up in him. He would go to the library at once and look up the story of Solveig's Lied. He would learn it and yet tell her; she would not need to be ashamed of her father for long. In fact fathers there were who even knew nothing about the existence of libraries. Yekel wanted to say one word to his daughter, but before he had a chance to speak she was inside the house. He stood for a moment, blankly staring after her,

then turned and walked heavily on, toward the library.

XLII

Some weeks before, a relative of Mira's in the millinery business in Boston had sent on to her a strip of black buckram and some wire, and with it a sample copy of a thing called a "band" made out of these materials and used on ladies' hats to raise them at the side, the front or the back, as fashion decreed. With the band had come a letter advising the Cohens to go into the same business in New York, the investment being slight and the opportunities great, the cost of manufacturing a gross, labor excepted, being no more than seventy cents and the selling price often double. It had taken Mira some time to act upon the suggestion, but she had done so at last. An exciting moment it was when she had sold a few gross and had received an order for several gross more that the children were helping her make. The hushed awe that was Mira's as she looked into a future golden on all sides through making bands! She said little but she knew it was God's answer to her faith in Him.

This Saturday afternoon she had no other thought than that the girls would devote themselves with her to making bands—and then they walked out, and with their father to boot! She was so astonished she could say nothing. When

they had shut the door behind them, she stood and gasped until, the faculty of speech at last restored to her, "*Vus,*" she asked, as of the walls of the room-of-all-affairs, "*is dus, zehr meshugas?*" (What is this craze of theirs?)

All at once it flashed upon her mind that her daughters were the invited guests of their father. Where? She made her guess at once: he must have taken them to the "Tlenta Garden" (Atlantic Garden). Of Atlantic Garden she had heard much and knew nothing, and she coveted the experience of visiting it not a little. Women of the neighborhood, treated now and then to that pleasure by their husbands, had spoken of the wonders of it to her. She was stung by jealousy, jealousy founded on more than the mere missing of the treat; her husband had chosen the children above her. She saw clearly in Yekel's conduct to-day a resolution to reform, and, that being his resolution, she felt the bulk of the benefit should accrue to her. Was she not his wife? She took mental stock of her various qualities, efficiency predominating, placed them in a row, argued her case and sighed martyrdom. She was not appreciated. Her husband could have gone around for a lifetime without finding another suited to him in his vagrancy (which would have thrown him and his family into an ocean, to drown, long ago). What had she not done to keep them above water! At home, who had really

run the business, he or she? He had puttered around, but she had done the work—the managing, the planning. And here, who managed on Gussie's paltry wages for all of them, he or she? And whose was the enthusiasm over the affair of the hat bands, hers or his? No, she had no luck. Not even the children had thought to suggest that he take their mother first. . . . She throbbed with a complex of emotions as her fingers flew deftly along the rim of buckram.

And when the heart-sting of the present grew less sharp, Mira foraged into the past. What had her life been? As a girl she had had to devote herself to a large family of sisters and brothers, for her mother had been an invalid. Immediately after marriage had come children; one died, another came. It seemed to her, as she looked back now, that there never had been a time when she was not burying one child and pregnant with another. For whom had she borne these children? Did she even know the man? Never. From the time they were married he had conducted himself with her like a haughty stranger. Yet children she had had to bear him. For the first time she felt an injustice in her lot.

It was at this point that the girls returned. Mira's heart bounded at the sight of them. She gave no greeting. Libbie was the first to speak. "Oh, mama," she cried, in Yiddish, which she nearly always used with Mira or Gussie, "I forgot

all about the bands. I would rather have stayed home and helped you. It wasn't nice. I didn't like it."

Mira drew her lips tightly together. Her small blue eyes she kept riveted upon her flying fingers. A trick, she thought, to "whiten her eyes." They would have to be sharper than that, she said to herself sarcastically, to keep her from knowing about their treat.

"Mama doesn't know where we went," ventured Annie whom her mother's hurt, by a delicate intuition, reached at once, and who felt her head reel with a farrago of feeling that beset her heart.

"I don't know where you went?" Mira raised her eyes and measured her daughter. "I do know." The sentence popped like a cork.

The girls looked at each other uncertainly, and instinctively felt the wisdom of making no answer. One went to one end of the room, the other to the other. Annie, stopping by the table to drop her hat, reflected, "Mama feels slighted." She felt helplessly responsible and sorry. She threw her mother a sidewise glance. The impulse to go over and explain came to her, but she ignored it, thinking, "She would call our trying for papa crazy. She might even laugh. Papa is hopeless to her." A feeling of impotence came over Annie. She gave her mother another glance, then she stood with head down, turning her hat

on one finger. She was being preyed on by misgiving. Her chest felt a load of lead. Goodness, what was going to happen? All at once came the answer, "Papa might have gone away to get drunk." She paused. Would he do it now when he must know that he meant everything in the world to her? Impossible. . . . But if he did—she drew herself up rigidly; not a trace of last night's intuitive realization, of her sympathy, remained in her. She was thinking fiercely, "If he does it now, he will be no good. I—I will hate him." Upon which broke Mira's raucous voice:

"Nu, really, it wouldn't suit a high-tone father like yours to take a plain wife to the Tlenta Garden. His fancy daughters become him better alongside of his side." And how it happened, Mira never knew, but she began to cry.

Libbie rushed to her mother's side. Annie, standing rooted by the table, thought dully: Would this be one stone more on the already too rough road? Was their mother going to make the hardship harder?

Meanwhile, Libbie was offering her explanation. "Why, ma, we didn't go to the Atlantic Garden; we went to Seward Park to hear the music."

Mira shook her off angrily.

"Nu, even if Seward Park?" she cried. "What is a mama, a floor rag, that you have to leave her home? Without your mama you would have had

a nice face in the world. Who worries and scurries for you if not your mama? A mama is cheap to you? You will see when you have no more mama, if she is cheap or not." Her voice was lost in a vigorous blowing of the nose.

Annie thought, "If he went away to get drunk, we have hurt her for nothing." She wanted to go over to her mother and add her explanation, her sympathy, her tenderness, but she could not. It was as if she were sworn away to her father, as if she could not divide herself.

All of a sudden Mira rose, wiped her eyes, grabbed up her shawl, and swept out of the house.

XLIII

As the door slammed after Mira, the girls exchanged mute glances. Without speaking, Annie went into the parlor where she sank down upon the horsehair lounge. She sat, without thought, staring at a picture of an elephantine gentleman of a clean-shaven smile who, with feminine daintiness and masculine satisfaction was biting into a grass-green pickle. Irritated by the sight of the picture she at last turned her eyes away. She sat absently biting her lower lip. "There would have been no use telling mama," she thought at length, "even if we could have saved her feelings that way. We couldn't have asked her to come along to-day. She will have to wait." There

echoed in her mind: "Wait for when?" Then: "Suppose papa comes back drunk?"

She rose from the lounge and sank limply into a chair. She dropped her head in her hands.

"Oh, if he would only come home sober!"

She burst into tears.

XLIV

When, an hour later, Yekel walked in straight on his feet, as if even the thought of drink were far remote from him, a hallowed feeling held Annie. She suddenly became very calm, like one sanctified, and a desire that her mother should come home so she could be kind to her and tender, came over her. Then joyousness, a nervous joyousness, a lightness came into her heart. It was easy to speak now.

"Papa, you think you could play Solveig's Lied?" she asked, a slight tremble in her voice. To the luster of her gray-blue eyes the flush of her cheeks somehow added mystery. She was beautiful, impenetrable for the moment. Yekel felt an exquisite pull from her. When Annie met his eyes she experienced a queer, sharp shock, which left a curious breathlessness of excitement in its wake.

Pride glowed in Yekel. In his breast pocket was the story of Solveig's Lied, all written out. Not only would he play, but he would tell her the

story. In the parlor, he could glance at his notes once more and make sure of the details, then, when she followed him in, as she probably would, he would remind her that she had asked him the story, and he, he would say, "Do you want me to tell you now?" He saw Annie's face light up with eagerness; he saw her hang upon his answer; he felt her pride in the father who knew the story of Solveig's Lied. Meanwhile, he had not answered her question.

A faint dampness came over Annie's light spirits. From a momentary fear of losing them altogether, she determined to make her father answer. She repeated, "Do you think, pa, you could play Solveig's Lied? You play everything by ear, don't you? Do you remember it?" Her heart beat.

Yekel, roused to a realization of his remissness, felt disgusted with himself.

"Maybe I could," he answered hoarsely, coughing. Upon the heels of this answer followed such self-consciousness that he simply could not bear Annie's proximity. He left for the parlor, where he immediately picked up his violin. He sat a moment breathing asthmatically, then he drew the bow over the strings. He played without coherency, scarcely conscious of what he was playing, until he glided into Solveig's Lied. He wanted to play it well. In his intense concentration, thought of all else dropped from him. He was

immersed, oblivious, and Annie's final coming into the room neither up-set nor pleased him. The final note left him feeling detached from the scene, remote. When Annie remarked, "How well you did it. It's the first time you ever played it, too, isn't it?" the words reached him as from a distance. He scarcely felt that Annie had addressed herself to him. He made no answer.

This time his silence provoked Annie. Why did he so persist in ignoring her advances?

Yekel began to play the Traumerei. He played it a little too slowly, with too much feeling, like one touched by the melodrama of life. At one point, a fact in the story of Solveig's Lied shot through his mind, and he struck a false note. After that he played badly, knew he was playing badly, and, at last, he quit. He looked round at Annie; their glances met. It was as if he were saying, "Well, you were pursuing. Do your work. I'm ready for you." And she, "I mean to overcome you. Why not capitulate?" They were both calm, ready.

Annie, from a lowered glance, saw a look of pain come into her father's eyes, to be superseded by one of cynicism. A slight uneasiness, as if she sensed a feeling of condescension for her immaturity, her audacity, came upon her. To keep her courage from ebbing away she argued inwardly, "Well, he does not know *how* grown-up I am." She would show him. She would talk to

him of God, of human beings, of stories. She could. Had she not done so with Doctor Ellis?

She cleared her throat, straightened up. Her father shifted uneasily in his chair. He patted his left hand clumsily with his right. She did not speak until he was composed. Then she asked, "Papa, do you believe in God?"

Yekel, surprised, looked up. Annie's glance was calm with purpose. Yekel breathed a sigh. He felt his answer slow and clamorous within him. Finally he said, "No, my child, I don't think I do."

Annie was gratified. "Neither do I," she concurred.

Yekel experienced an odd electric shock, not at what she said nor how she looked, but that she, Annie, was at all. He had until that moment never really been able fully to realize that she existed; her nearness, her talking to him made her seem for the first time all real. Yekel's self for a moment seemed to slip from his body and hover entranced within her.

Across the narrow open space that divided the Cohen tenement from the adjoining one came the sound of a neighbor's voice, singing. It hit into the room making a savage din in Yekel's ears, while he strained for fear he should miss something of what his daughter had to say.

His straining attention gave his face that half human, half animal expression peculiar to heavy

drinkers, which, despite herself, stirred a slight repulsion in Annie. She seemed to see him more vividly than she ever had before, as if a strong light had suddenly been thrown upon him, and she involuntarily shrank from what she saw. He was dirty, bloated. He looked stupid. And because Annie was endeavoring to achieve an unaccustomed closeness to him, she was the more repelled. She did not know how or why, but some very small spot in her heart that moment turned cold like ice. Yet it did not lessen her determination and purpose. She would bring her father into the family fold. In a moment she was quite herself again. He had made no comment on her answer. She meant to get it.

"It's funny we both think the same way," she ventured, using the Yiddish.

Yekel sighed and answered, also in Yiddish, "Not quite the same. At your age I was also sure. Now I am only pretty nearly sure."

"Then," promptly replied Annie, "you have gone backwards."

Yekel was startled into a laugh.

It was the first time Annie had heard him laugh, and it seemed to transform him. From a dirty, bloated creature, he turned into someone beautiful—like Prince Answer.

A great love welled up in Annie's heart for Yekel. She became so eager to proceed with their talk that to avert possible interruption, she shot

up from her seat and closed the door. As if propelled by her impulse, Yekel also rose and closed the window to shut out the neighbor's song. There was a little flushed, nervous pause after they were seated again, then Yekel said:

"When did you decide all this about religion, my daughter?"

Actually he had spoken first! Annie was delighted. She leaned forward and said eagerly: "I thought it out when I was sick." She paused. "I used to think," she resumed hastily, as if not to give herself time for a loss of courage, "that you were good to sit by me and watch me." She was anxious to catch a glimpse of his expression so that she might discern how he was taking this statement of hers. Yekel was sitting with his head bowed and she couldn't see his face. "You must have been so good to me," she ventured, "because you care for me a lot."

Yekel glanced up sharply. Annie looked at him searchingly. A sarcastic smile seeming to flit across his face, undermined Annie's courage. She braced herself; she had gotten so far, she told herself, she must go on to the end. She took up again the impersonal question of God. "God is too strict," she said. Even if He loves you, He punishes you." She felt her father's eyes on her, but this time she could not look up to meet them. With a sudden resolve, she plunged to the heart of what was in her mind. "You were better than

God was to me. He stayed the same, I mean just like He is supposed to be, strict or whatever it is, and He punished me with typhoid fever. For a sin He punished me, I guess. But anyway you weren't like that; you changed for me; you didn't drink all that time, and you used to talk to mama, and me, and the children, and—and—everything." She broke off abruptly, overcome by sudden timidity. There was a moment's pause. Then something in Yekel's eyes encouraged Annie to add simply: "I love you too," and she assumed an attitude as much as to say, "You may think what you like of this, it is true."

The expression in Yekel's eyes changed. Clearly he was thinking she was a hypocrite, demanding to know why she had turned away from him to the stranger, Doctor Ellis. Annie could scarcely extricate herself from the medley of emotions that struggled in her mind. She could think of no way to explain to her father the change that had taken place in her heart. Out of her mental turmoil emerged two convictions: her father must not *say* what was in his mind, and she must not let him. She said, suppressing her agitation: "I can't see how if God loves us all like it says in religion He does, He can let us suffer,—so much anyway. It's terrible to be sick. And goodness, to die! Little Nina, she was such a—" her voice broke; "such a darling little baby. How could He make her die! And make us suffer so about it. And He

gave me yet typhoid fever besides." She was saying this, and what she really wanted to say was: "I found out Doctor Ellis, that he didn't care for me at all. I found it out when he dropped me after I was better. He made believe he loved me when he didn't. I know how you must have felt, papa, when you saw I was friendlier with him than with you after you were so good to me." . . . She said aloud: "I don't believe there is a God at all." What she wanted to say was: "But you see, papa, I really didn't know my own mind until the night when Joshua Levine came and I heard you talk. It was like a big light falling on you all of a sudden. You see I really am not a hyprocrite for talking to you like I do now." Tears gathered to her eyes. It was a critical moment. Either her father's heart had penetrated hers and he understood, or it hadn't and he didn't understand, and her quest was lost. She suffered as she waited for his response.

The thought came suddenly into Yekel's mind: "She loves me. She never really loved that Ellis doctor. It was only his fine manners and his fine clothes." But he was looking down and Annie could not see his wistful expression. He said nothing. He began to fumble with a button on his coat.

"I think God is awful," concluded Annie, and she waited as though this were the throw upon which both their lives depended, for behind these

words lurked the thought: "I am through with Doctor Ellis. I want you."

"I think God is awful!"

Yekel hearing, had an odd sense of unfulfillment, as if he had gone round and round and gotten nowhere, for here was his child conjecturing about God in exactly the same way he had done when a youth. It struck him suddenly as ludicrous. He wanted terribly to laugh. But looking up, he caught Annie's pathetically earnest expression. Almost without his volition he bent forward to take her in his arms.

Suddenly the shadow of a white, supple hand—

Yekel stared. He drew himself up rigidly. A terrible pallor spread over his face. He brought his hand over his hallucinated eyes. "Oh, no," he murmured, like one begging for mercy.

Annie's heart stood still.

The door of the room-of-all-affairs slammed suddenly. Mira's raucous voice: "Believe me, my Gussie, you can consider yourself lucky. There aren't a *million* Joshuas looking for poor girls like you."

The white hand with its tumbler persisted before Yekel's vision, and Regina, it seemed, was crying passionately: "Papa, papa let's talk again to-morrow."

A shiver went over his skin.

Yekel drew back from a face dim, elusive as a breath, with alluring eyes of deep blue, now

turned to the tumbler in her hands, now raised to him. . . . Slowly she lifted the tumbler and pressed it against his lips.

He flung his hand up to his mouth, swept Regina aside. "No—I—won't!" he hissed, staring Annie in the face.

Clear as crystal came the realization of her failure. Annie stood stark, then turned and fled.

And with Annie fled from Yekel the vision of the tumbler, and the hand, and Regina's face.

Like a mound of ashes, he collapsed upon the horsehair lounge. The consciousness of his daughter's misunderstanding beat like tired wings in his brain, but Yekel could not go to her and explain. He fell asleep on the lounge, where later Mira found him.

"Let him sleep here to-night," she whispered to Gussie, "he looks as though a regiment of soldiers couldn't wake him."

XLV

Yekel awoke in the morning surprised to find himself on the lounge with all his clothes on, remembering nothing. Then, in a flash, a recollection of the explanation he owed his daughter came to him. He would go and talk to Annie at once. Under the urge of this ambition Yekel lost his habitual reserve. He rose with sprightliness, and with abundant vigor he brushed with his bare

hands his crumpled clothes. He took out a diminutive comb from his breast pocket and combed his hair. While doing so he subconsciously listened for sounds of wakefulness in the house, but he w. too preoccupied to know whether or not he was hearing them. He felt anxious and hurried, and yet not a single definite phrase of the explanation he wanted to make was in his mind. He was concerned only with seizing the opportunity.

His hair combed, Yekel from force of habit looked under the lounge to assure himself of the safety of his violin. Then he was ready to go. Passing through the bedroom he dimly perceived that his wife was still in bed. Reaching the room-of-all-affairs, he saw that Gussie still lay asleep. He was surprised. Then, seeing Annie also asleep, he was utterly shocked. Automatically he took out his watch from his vest pocket. Disappointment racing through his heart, he stared at the watch for a moment unseeing, thinking not of the time but of Annie. At last he became sharply aware of the fact that it was only half past six o'clock, and he remembered that Annie was never up before he left for work. Two emotions held him simultaneously: disappointment and relief; and then disappointment alone. He stood motionless a moment wondering what to do, and then told himself he must be patient until evening; in

the evening his opportunity would come. He caught sight of the family towel lying on the back of a chair and was reminded that he had to wash. He picked up the towel, went out into the public hall, washed at the public sink, dried himself and came back feeling a little less dull, and able to think more clearly. He thought on the pity of it that Annie was asleep, for she would spend a needlessly unhappy day. Occupied with the thought, he abstractedly sat down, unlaced his shoes and took them off. At once he woke up to what he had done, and hated himself for his stupidity. While he was putting his shoes on again he kept glancing up at Annie. Poor child, he thought, feeling bitter against himself. Even in her sleep she expressed unrest. He had grieved her. He had half a mind to wake her up. But Gussie would wake up too, and then, of course, it would be of no use to try and talk to Annie. He felt somehow impelled to gaze at Gussie, at her phlegmatic face, with the thick lips parted, and her red hair strewn all over the pillow. His thoughts flitted around her happiness in her engagement to Joshua Levine, and he hated her. He thought of Joshua Levine—the colossal self-confidence of him, the air of broad ownership he assumed toward Gussie and the home in spite of his short acquaintance, and he hated Joshua.

His shoes at last on and fastened, Yekel rose to go. He hated the heavy sound of his feet upon

the rickety floor. Thoughts of Annie again flickered in his mind. But as he reached the street he was once more consumed by hatred which closed her out. He hated the disconcerting light after the dusk indoors. He hated the feel of his perspiration-dank clothes against his skin. He felt old and worn, set aside somewhere where black beetles crawled over and around him. And then suddenly the craving for drink sprang upon him. It grew stronger every moment.

He must be master over himself, he declared. Now of all times he must have control over himself. As if the craving were a thing separate from him, he walked faster to get away from it. Over and over again he told himself that now of all times he must have control over his weakness. But in spite of it the craving grew ever more intense. He was afraid to walk any farther, as if to do so were to go right into the clutches of danger. He stopped short and raised a clenched fist and dug it into his cheek. "I must not get drunk now," he thought, "I must not." He paused. Annie's face obtruded itself before his vision: "I give you my word of honor," he said, and repeated, "I give you my word of honor, Annie, that I will keep sober. I—I—won't get drunk—Now, see if I do." The words came with a little catch, for a lump in his throat. He wanted to cry.

He resumed his walking with a lighter step.

His craving, like something tangible, and alive, seemed to follow him. He brushed it aside: "I can't," he said, "I can't do anything for you. I gave Annie my word of honor." After that he kept on thinking: "I gave her my word of honor, my word of honor," until, at last, he reached Feifa Teitelbaum's shop.

XLVI

But of all that had passed in her father's heart Annie knew nothing. After a restless night and the too-sound sleep of early morning, she woke up spiritually sick, and with a headache. In order not to betray what was wrong to Libbie who, she knew, would take the opportunity at once to wipe her hands of the whole undertaking, Annie assumed a little white, blank smile, until at last, on the pretext of having been asked by her teacher to be at school early, she made off alone, but not before having tucked in between her books a volume of fairy tales Doctor Ellis had given her. She had a feeling she would want to read during recess rather than speak to any of the girls, to whom she might betray her troubled spirit.

Once on the street she hurried under the compelling force of the lie she had told, as if so to make a truth of it.

She did not slow her steps until she faced Allen

Street School. Her instinctive volition was to hurry in, but somehow she did not. She stopped short and swept a glance over the age-worn, sickly exterior of the building. There was an air of decay about the deserted school that seemed to exude a bad odor. It made her headache worse. Somehow, very suddenly, she felt herself in a nervous tremble. It was not of her own volition that she turned and fled.

Even as, all confused, she was fleeing, the thought, like a harrying wasp, buzzed upon the surface of her mind: "Only ten more days before graduation. I shouldn't miss one of them. I shouldn't miss one of them."

But it was of no use. She was divided into two selves, one of which paid no heed to the other.

It was the two selves she brought to Brooklyn Bridge, one of which gratefully sank onto a bench and sighed relief.

Presently the dual tune of the spirit merged. She reached a harmonious decision that what she had done was best; that nervous, tired and burning with despair as she was, the day at school would be more wasted than here, for here she meant to think away the heartache, to think herself back to mental balance.

She relaxed and sank into a twilight of meditation.

"He has no heart." That was her first thought.

From somewhere came a lapping echo. She listened. "He has no heart." It was the water below, striking against the moss-covered buoys.

It was as if, bored by its watery limits, the river was glad to pick up again a thread that linked it with earth. Annie could see it quite as an East Side matron, folding her hands in her lap, taking on an air of readiness for gossip. She turned her back as if to avoid the temptation to disloyalty and, feeling the water's inquisitive presence nevertheless, dismissed all thought of her father. "I must make up my mind what to do," she thought, and paused as if she expected somebody to tell her what she must do.

She stared into space, unthinking, dimly conscious of the water's maddening repetition, "Your father is a hopeless drunkard, your father is a hopeless drunkard."

A weariness came over her. Her spirit seemed to throw off its struggle, and relax. She was being rowed away, it seemed to her, to a coast where silver clouds hung in the sky; being rowed farther and farther away. At one moment that melancholy that seizes travelers who, by nature, are home lovers, seized her. Everything was near its ending—everything she knew—all the universe. A lump rose in her throat as, in her mind, she bade her father farewell. As upon a flood she was carried to where fairy visions filled the air. Her hands fumbled unconsciously with

her books, and she drew one out and opened its pages. A voice reached her, at first not distinct in its identity, and then plainly that of Doctor Ellis:

"'The sun was just going down. The whole air looked red, as from fire. The forest was still and, sinking down upon his knees, Prince Answer sang the evening hymn, and then said to himself, 'I shall find her, sweet tired girl whom I am looking for. The sun can go down, night can come, dark night, but I shall find her. Before the sun sinks entirely behind the earth I will climb up there on the rocks which are about the height of the highest trees, and look down into the town below for a sight of the shabbiest shanty. Therein she lives, poor patient girl.'

"He laid hold of the tendrils and roots and climbed the wet stones, bruising himself. Water snakes glided about, toads seemed to snap up at him, but he was not daunted. Indeed, he reached the top before sundown, as he had determined. Oh, what magnificence! For a swift second Prince Answer forgot his momentous errand, so absorbed was he in the beauty of the sun as it lay upon the horizon like a crimson altar. Song seemed afloat; the forest behind him sang; the sky above, where all sorts of glowing colors melted into one, seemed to sing a great anthem; his own heart sang. All of nature seemed to have turned itself into a vast, glorious church,

trees and clouds forming the pillars, grass and flowers the embroidered altar-cloth, and heaven itself the large dome.

"The red faded from the sky as at last the sun disappeared behind the horizon. Prince Answer spread out his arms toward the sky, when suddenly his eyes fell upon the town below, upon a group of shabby shanties, and he remembered his dream-girl. A great love, which his sense of the beauty he had just encountered had only heightened, came over him for her. He made his way down the mountain path faster than was safe, not stopping even for breath. At last, some distance down, he scanned as far as he could the village that lay awake below. He could see distinctly the red and green and gray housetops, with their chimneys. He thought he could make out the shabbiest one. He hurried. By the way he had chosen he arrived at the exact point he had noted. From inside the shabby shanty pitiful cries of pain reached him. He knocked. No answer, except hurried footsteps, fading away. And then moans were wafted out to him. He opened the door. Upon the floor, hurt and sick as it seemed, *she* lay in all her beauty!

"Resplendent in his glittering armor, he knelt down beside her, humble and full of pity.

" 'Beloved, beloved, come with me away from this!' " he implored.

A truck stumbling noisily past brought Annie

rudely back from her dreamland to a realization that she had unconsciously read from the book of fairy tales a part of her favorite story. A medly of feelings held her a moment, and out of them a loneliness for Doctor Ellis emerged, single and strong. Had he really forgotten all about her? As if to discipline herself, she deliberately turned her mind from Doctor Ellis to her father. There came back to her a memory of the pain of their parting. Her heart began to throb now with the same pain. The softest of spirits stole over her, as she experienced the odd sensation of her father merging with Doctor Ellis. Next, she became oblivious of both. She relaxed luxuriously and gazed up at the sky where she seemed to see the sun lying upon the horizon like a crimson altar. City noises coming to her from all sides sounded like a chant. In the fleecy clouds she saw trees and lovely flowers and princes. Then these melted into one, and upon the horizon stood her Prince Answer. Doctor Ellis! Her heart jumped. She sat forward. But he seemed to change every moment, to look quite strange now, and now quite himself again. Resplendent in his golden armor, Prince Answer—or was it really Doctor Ellis—was striding down a mountain path to Division Street, and you could see by the expression of his face that his mind was full of thoughts of saving her from *that* life.

Another truck grinding by brought Annie back

to reality. What, she meditated, did "beloved" mean, and what, "Prince Answer"? Did Prince Answer mean one's husband? Yes, one's husband—that's what it meant. Would she have a husband some day? If she did, then she would have children—maybe boy children, too—for children were the result of marriage. Strange. How very strange. Silence fell, and she began to dream again. . . . Now the fleecy clouds were lovely fairy visions of little girls, some of them strikingly like Nina, dear little Nina; and others, boys, some resembling her papa, others Doctor Ellis, and others again her brother Benjamin, who had run away from home long, long ago. The several visions melted into one; once more only Prince Answer was there, this time with one hand upon his golden girdle, and one foot raised to step into a swan-shaped boat, white as snow. Suddenly an overwhelming desire to fly through the air up to him seized Annie, and grew more powerful as he moved away. "Oh!" she gasped, rising up from her seat. Her books fell to the ground with a noisy thud, but she did not hear it. "Oh!" she cried again. . . . Fainter grew the vision of Prince Answer. . . . In a wave of passionate longing for the beauty of him, Annie flung her hands upward: "Take me along! Take me along!" she cried, just as he and the swan-boat disappeared under a gray cloud.

Swiftly and sharply Annie's mind was caught

again by the thought of Doctor Ellis. Prince Answer and he *were* one! She bent with feverish haste to pick up her books. She had to see Doctor Ellis. He had not forgotten her. He had not. It was all a mistake. She had no thought for her father.

XLVII

Yekel had reached the shop that morning to find the door closed. On this day of all days he was earlier than Feifa Teitelbaum, who was always first to arrive, since he trusted no one with the key to the front door.

Feifa Teitelbaum, when he came a moment later, evinced no pleasure, pain or surprise at Yekel's early arrival. He let only a casual "Good morning" break through the rigidity of his lips and then, unlocking the door, disappeared stiffly into a tiny anteroom. This cut Yekel to the quick. Feifa Teitelbaum should have made at least a pretext at conversation; should have said something about the weather if need be,—something. Though he was the boss and Yekel only the bastings puller, who in the world was Feifa that he so totally ignored another? Yekel's heart swelled with dislike.

Feifa Teitelbaum came out of the anteroom and, from half-raised eyes glanced at Yekel standing idle. In spite of himself that fear that game feels before the hunter, or the mouse in the pres-

ence of the cat, came over Yekel. But he did not let it conquer him. Brusquely turning his back, he stood scratching his coat sleeve with the nail of his forefinger, in his heart brave defiance. Feifa's dark look penetrated right through Yekel's back, and he might as well have spoken the rebuke: "When once you are early you stand wasting time instead of setting right to work the way an honest person would."

Feifa coughed a cough that presaged vexation.

Yekel's heart leaped. In another moment he was seating himself and searching around on the floor for the coat upon which to begin the day's work. He could not disentangle it quickly from the others and soon he was coloring under Feifa's glances. He had been the worker too long to be master of himself.

At last Yekel found the coat, bent low his head, and began to pluck the white knots with all the agility at his command. His fingers trembled, for he recalled several instances when Feifa Teitelbaum had actually discharged workers of long standing for no greater offence than his. His mind drifted on into thoughts about the future. Some day he would leave Feifa Teitelbaum. But much as he hated the work and the master, the idea of a change he hated more. He could not bear the thought of having to enter into contact with a wider circle than the one he already had grown

accustomed to. He was afraid of strange places, of strange faces, afraid.

When Feifa appeared at his elbow to ask whether a certain job had been disposed of, Yekel humbly answered "Yes, sir." The next moment he was burning with humiliation, with disgust for himself. "Sir? Should I have said 'Sir' to him?" He wanted to rise and spit in Feifa's face to prove his courage.

The arrival of other workers was a relief. It was as if the humiliation would now be divided with his fellows. He breathed more freely, and his eyes rose dumbly now to one, now to another of the arrivals as if to ask by what trick of fate he and they carried fear in their hearts. A confused compassion for his class entered Yekel's heart. He was glad that there was only a ruling minority in the world for it left a decent majority. He saw bosses now as the stolid people, with closed hearts, with minds that grow angry, with murky souls. His fear, his hatred turned into calm contempt. He was glad he was not one of them. That thought somehow brought a vision of clean, pure Annie.

Now let's see, how would he begin? He would at supper—no, after supper—he would choose a moment when no one was within hearing; he would say, "Come into the front room, Annie. I have something to tell you."

When once he had said that she would know

he was willing to carry forward her plan of friendship between them. Or would it be safer to explain his queer answer of the night before? But how explain? No. He would not explain. He would ask her if she wanted to hear the story of Solveig's Lied.

And then he would tell her.

XLVIII

Annie knew that Doctor Ellis' office was on East Eighty-Fifth Street, and she knew too that it was an enormous distance from Brooklyn Bridge. But that did not stay her determination to reach him. At first she ran, but soon she had to reduce her pace. By the time she had reached Fifty-Ninth Street she was so tired as to be spiritless, and she decided to sit down and rest on a wooden box that happened to be standing behind the figure of a stone bear. She sat and sat, and thought and thought, and the longer she sat and the more she thought, the less keen she grew to visit Doctor Ellis, not out of a lesser desire to see him, but because of a greater uncertainty that he would be glad to see her. There was no denying that if he had wanted to see her he would have come to her.

At last, somewhat rested, and calmer, she resolved first to walk over and see Normal College, where she was to attend after her graduation.

She would like to see the place, she argued. She rose and walked slowly on.

Normal College stood bathed in a strangeness before which Annie stood and gasped. Green trees, grass, clean streets. It seemed to her the earth had shrunk from a cosmic pigsty to a fairy court, the unbelievable thing being that this was the same earth she knew. Here was no clatter, no tumult, no dirt. Here was a restfulness, a dignity, an elusive something that made you want to throw your chest out, breathe deeply, and that filled you with a sense of thanksgiving as if you were the recipient of some great bounty. She looked up and down the street. She walked to the corner, looked to the right, to the left. What was that beyond, that big stretch of green openness? A country? A forest? A park? Oh, yes, Central Park. Doctor Ellis lived near that park. He had told her so. All of a sudden an overwhelming eagerness took hold of her to get inside the park, to explore its newness, to see it all, to feel it, to know it. She broke into a run, and when she had got into the park she stood and contemplated it with amazement, the whole open country, so inundated with the caressing radiance of the sun, so drowned in the delicate charm of the day's serenity. Laurel was in blossom and formed a rose-tinted network against the background of green and of shimmering water. Tears came to Annie's eyes and her whole being grew

afire with a sensuous delight. She took deep breaths of air. She was transported with delight, overwhelmed with wonder. She looked around and around and around. Following the curve of the water wound a row of maple trees. A fine mist hung suspended which the sun's rays crossed and silvered.

Not another person was in sight. By a sudden impulse she crossed over to the laurel blossoms and bent her face now against this branch, now against that, to feel the thrill of its caress. Then abruptly she bent forward, hastily tore off a handful of the petals, stuffed them into her mouth and chewed them eagerly. She was in an ecstasy of being alive, filled with tumultuous happiness, a kind of intoxication. "I—I don't want papa," she cried to herself. "I—I—want—Nina, little Nina. Beauty. Doctor Ellis. Prince Answer. I don't want papa. I want Doctor Ellis."

And she rushed away.

XLIX

At last she reached the imposing brownstone house, with its face of creeping ivy and its patches of green lawn. She stood in front of it, undecided between two impulses. One was to hasten in, the other, for God's sake to wait a moment—just one more moment. She strained to catch a glimpse of the interior. The curtains of

one window were parted. She could see a long narrow room, with a table in the center and books and magazines on it. Against the wall she could see the tops of heavy mahogany chairs. Oil paintings were on the walls. An interior as imposing as the exterior. . . . Her courage almost failed her. Suddenly she saw folding doors open in the adjoining room. And *he* came in. There was a long flat desk. He sat down and began to write. Sitting so, he looked like a man of stone, except for the side of his coat which flapped lightly from the movement of his arm as he wrote. Dear coat—how many times she had fumbled with the lapels of it while he had sat on the edge of her chair-bed. Yes, it was the same coat, light gray—no, the other had been darker. All of a sudden a great loneliness, a great desire to weep came over her. She sank down on the stone steps and put her face in her hands. Under her hands, before her eyes, her father, Prince Answer, Doctor Ellis, little Nina passed in slow succession, and before each her soul seemed to go down on its knees and beg for peace.

At last she rose, mechanically. She did not know how she managed to ascend the steps, her knees were so shaky.

The door opened.

Annie's heart stood still, and then began to beat terribly fast and to hurt her, for it was evi-

dent Doctor Ellis did not recognize her. He did not know her.

"Doctor—Doctor Ellis—" she faltered.

"Yes, this is Doctor Ellis." He was frowning, for it was after his consultation hours. He had caroused the night before, and was anxious to go home and take a little more sleep.

"I—"

"Are you in pain? It's after office hours," he said in an unfriendly voice.

"No—Doctor Ellis—you remember me? I—"

The frown left the doctor's face, and the promise of a smile of recognition took its place.

"Why, yes," he hesitated, "yes, I do remember. I know your face well enough, but I can't just place you." He opened the door wider.

"I'm—I'm Annie Cohen."

Truth to tell, Doctor Ellis remembered the face better. He had visited many Cohens during his months of volunteer district work in the East Side.

"I had the typhoid fever."

"Well!" Doctor Ellis remembered in a flash. He could scarcely believe the lovely vision of near-womanhood before him—she *was* lovely, despite the faded pink flowers on the shabby leghorn hat, and the ill-fitting red cotton dress—was the same little girl whose little sister had been run over, and to whom he had once brought red

roses. There, now, he remembered quite distinctly.

Doctor Ellis smiled so broadly now he was quite his dear old self. And yet Annie felt herself held off from him as if by an invisible hand. It was with hesitating steps that she followed him into the house. Tears were exasperatingly close to her eyes.

"And are you all well again?" inquired the doctor as he ushered her into his office.

"Yes, but——"

Doctor Ellis gave her a sharp glance of inquiry, and then there came to him a vague memory that something somewhere in her anatomy had not been quite to his satisfaction on his last visit—yes, a dull lung sound. He remembered it clearly.

"Be seated, be seated," he said, as he took his own chair. A desire to finish a report he had begun and get home passed over the surface of his mind. He was busy a moment with the papers on his desk, and then he turned to her again.

"You've certainly grown," he commented, while his appraising eyes traveled over the lift of her budding breasts.

Annie's eyes followed his and, somehow, recollecting Libbie's knowing glances, she lifted her dress at the waist so that it fell fuller over her breast.

Doctor Ellis noted the movement. His quizzical eyes searched more deeply into Annie's, as

they were wont to do into the eyes of women, and Annie under their spell felt her heart beat fast. She felt herself blushing.

Meanwhile, Doctor Ellis was thinking he would examine her.

Without in the least intending to do so, Annie blurted out, "Oh, Doctor Ellis, do you *really* know me? I—I think you don't know me at all." The whole burden of her loneliness and disappointment found expression in that cry. She began to weep.

Doctor Ellis came to a swift intuitive realization of what this visit meant to Annie. Tenderness, a little heightened by the liquor still in his blood, was in his voice as he said, "Oh, there now, well, I should say I do remember you." Paternal feelings mingled with others in his heart as Doctor Ellis took Annie between his knees, removed the hat from her head, and with his own handkerchief wiped her eyes, and at last helped her unbutton her dress for examination.

While Annie, with strange quiverings, was mounting the examination table, feverishly bent on keeping the front of her dress over her breast, Doctor Ellis stood at the white porcelain basin washing his hands, thinking of the whiteness of her skin and saying:

"Yes, I remember perfectly. I read you a fairy-tale once, that you liked very much, with a

Prince Answer in it. We used to talk, too. And let's see—didn't your father drink?"

His words dinned in Annie's ears. Automatically, in a choked voice, she answered "Yes," and a queer feeling as if her father were on the table with her, held her for a moment, then disappeared.

Was it Prince Answer or Doctor Ellis coming toward her?

Doctor Ellis stood over her a moment, smiling. Then he took her hands, one at a time, and laid them ceremoniously to the right and left sides of her. "I won't eat you," he said, and lifting her dress from her breast smiled down into her face. Ridiculous as he knew it to be, he felt his eyes cloud with mist as he looked down into her pretty face.

The promising beauty of the tender breasts of her! White and smooth and gently rounded. He laid his hand under her left breast to feel her heart which was beating fast under a confused shame coursing through her.

Doctor Ellis said, "There, there now," in a rather muffled voice, and very gently his hand went round and round over her breast.

Some impelling force made Annie stiffen. She looked up at Doctor Ellis questioningly.

"There, there now," he repeated, and took away his hand and applied the stethoscope. Annie wondered what he was listening to so intently,

for it seemed to her everything in her had gone absolutely silent.

Abruptly Doctor Ellis lifted his stethoscope. One at a time he took the ear pieces from his ears.

He pulled Annie's clothes up. "Dress," he said, and went and sat down at his desk.

Her hands unsteady, Annie stood dressing, the while she watched Doctor Ellis' grave demeanor. All she could think of were Libbie's smiles, Libbie's words, Libbie's manner, all seeming to give the lie to the wonderfulness of the Doctor Ellis she had known, and to make a liar of herself. Strangely, she felt her defence weaken within her now.

Dressed, she went and stood uncertainly beside the doctor's desk. He continued writing as he said, "Sit down."

She took her seat.

He wrote and wrote. At last he put down his pen and looked up. He brought his arms up in a semicircle over his head and sat as if thinking hard. For the first time Annie noticed that the brown bristles of his unshaven face were mixed with gray, and that there was gray flecking his brown hair. The old love for Doctor Ellis mingled with disappointment, rose in her again, for in some vague way he seemed to resemble her father. She felt a shrinking from him, as if at any mo-

ment Doctor Ellis might sit forward and hiss in her face, "I won't." She sat tense.

"You're fine and well," Doctor Ellis said at last. "Lungs, heart, kidneys, all in tip-top shape." He smiled. There was in his smile now too much of the old Doctor Ellis for Annie's heart to resist him. An overwhelming desire to entreat Doctor Ellis to wipe out the past few minutes—whatever they had been—came over her. She wanted to pull out the book of fairy-tales and beg him to read to her as he used to do. But she sat perfectly still and did nothing.

Doctor Ellis sat a moment looking as if something perplexed him greatly, then he said, "Come here."

A terrible awareness of his presence sprang up in Annie. He seemed to grow very big as she falteringly approached him.

He touched the stuff of her dress. "Red," he said, "this hot day?" Annie hated the dress she wore. Doctor Ellis' comment brought shame surging up in her. But her shame for the dress was lost the next moment in the shame that arose from the fact that Doctor Ellis had begun to fondle her. He was stroking her neck, her bare arms. Then he kissed her.

Something wondered mightily in Annie, as she stood feeling a stranger to herself, and yet perfectly familiar to the situation.

Then Doctor Ellis strained her to him.

Just as an involuntary fierce surge of revolt leaped up in Annie, he released her, saying in a most matter-of-fact tone, "Tell your mother you are very well. She needn't worry about you." It might have been an answer to a question. He added, rising and going to the white porcelain bowl again and beginning to wash his hands, "You may go now." And, looking over his shoulder at her, "You can find your way to the door yourself, don't you think?"

Annie said weakly, "Yes." She turned to go.

"Good-by," Doctor Ellis called after her cheerily.

More weakly still, Annie answered, "Good-by."

She walked like an automaton through the waiting room—out into the vestibule—to the door. She opened the door automatically.

Out on the street, directly in front of the house, a dispute between two men had attracted a small crowd. As Annie looked at the crowd, she had a queer sensation for a moment that they were all Libbies, all smiling knowingly, derisively. Their voices rising in a jumble of sound seemed to be directed against her in mockery. A hot flush of shame coursed through her.

Out of sight of the crowd she began to experience an odd feeling of confused identity. Had she really seen Doctor Ellis? Had he really not recognized her at all at first? Had she really

had typhoid fever, and at that time known a Doctor Ellis whom she had loved? Had she a father who had told her he would have none of her friendship? It all seemed to exist somewhere in mid-air instead of in her. Why were flushes of shame coursing through her? Why did she so dislike herself? Who was she?

Her feet felt heavy. Something bore her down. The walk was endless—blocks and blocks and blocks. Yet some part of her was glad of the interminability of the walk, for the end of it was to bring Libbie, Libbie's knowing smiles. Libbie's voice was in Annie's ears. "Dirty slob!" she heard her say. Was she really that? Doctor Ellis had kissed her; he had touched her here and here and here. Had he also—— Annie's heart stood still.

She became confused. She hated Doctor Ellis, and dry sobs choked her.

L

The end of the day had found Yekel so attuned to an explanatory conversation with his daughter that to come home and find her away simply undid him. He felt the extremity of disappointment a child can feel, disappointment to the point of tears. In a little while the feeling abated. But he sat through supper nervously on the alert for her footsteps, for her voice if she should chance

to speak to somebody in the hall. At the same time he listened eagerly to surmises dropped at the table. Said Mira, "She maybe was sent up to colnedge by the teacher around." Said Gussie, "Maybe to get introduced to the colnedge professors."

Immediately after supper Joshua arrived, and Yekel hastened off to the front room where he felt more at home. There he sank heavily into the horsehair lounge and, absently, from force of habit, groped under the lounge for the violin. Finding it, he drew it out and laid it on his lap. Then he relaxed. He dismissed the feeling of disappointment and inwardly again, as he had during the day, he enacted the scene to come. He would begin by telling Annie the story of Solveig's Lied. No, he would begin by asking her in the most casual way to come in and spend a little time with him. He would do that to establish an immediate doubt in her mind as to whether she had understood him aright the night before. When she was with him in the parlor, perhaps she herself would ask him if he had meant what he had said. And if she didn't? He would then say—no, he wouldn't. He would plunge immediately into the story of Solveig's Lied. "You asked me the other day. You remember?"

Growing tired, he sat for a long time, idle and unthinking. Mira's voice sounded. "God in

heaven, where is that girl?'' Libbie's voice, ''The nasty thing. I betcha she could 'a' come home and tell you first where she's going. She knows you worry, but you think she cares?'' Joshua's laugh, followed by, ''A good daughter you have in your Libbie.'' Answered Libbie, ''No, honest, you don't know that Annie. Think *she* cares that mama worries? Not she.''

Said Joshua to Mira, ''You're coming with us anyway, aren't you?'' He and Gussie were going to look at furniture and it had been agreed that Mira should go with them. Mira hesitated a moment. ''Yes,'' she said at last. ''Libbie, you'll give Annie her supper when she comes,'' she added. Yekel heard Libbie snap out, ''All right.'' Then he heard the stirring of feet and the door closed. A silence of a few moments followed, then Libbie, who had a pretty soprano voice, began to sing ''Home, Sweet Home.'' Automatically Yekel picked up his violin and began to accompany her.

LI

The East Side streets were miserably dim, the lamps throwing beams such a short distance as to be almost useless. Down each street one saw only dim spots of light starting out of the gloom. And such a din as came from the open windows! Annie crossed the street and turned

the corner into Division Street. On the corner was a woman's coat shop, with "MAGNIFICENT" blazoned in great letters above a scant collection of unpromising goods in the window, gathered together like a tired family in its sickly abode. Annie passed the dully lighted shop and turned in at her own door. In a moment she was inside the hall, sniffing at the hot, odor-laden air. Walking up the stairs, she heard her sister's singing, her father's accompaniment. Through her fagged brain coursed the thought, "Home, sweet home, this?" She opened the door. Libbie looked up at her quickly, and her song broke off. "Gee," she cried, "you! I thought you're dead already." Annie did not answer. She took off her hat, while her glance gratefully took in the fact that her bed was already made up. How she wanted to lie down and go to sleep!

"Mama was worried to death about you," nagged Libbie. "Couldn't you come first and say you're gone away and won't be back till late? Where were you, anyhow?"

Annie frowned and remained silent. "Can'che talk?" Libbie flung indignantly.

"Oh, let me alone," cried Annie, and began to undress.

"Mama left you supper," barked Libbie, contrition stirring in her. "Better eat it."

"I don't want it."

"Maybe you ate already in the Waldorf-

Astoria as you're gonna be a college lady,'' said Libbie, laughing, hoping by facetiousness to win Annie over to eating for she knew her mother would be distressed were she to find Annie had not eaten.

Annie continued to undress, making no response.

There was a moment's silence.

''Where were you?'' repeated Libbie.

Annie gave herself a shake as if to throw off Libbie's nagging. A poignant sense of distaste for her sister rose up in her. ''Listen, Libbie,'' she said, ''just leave me alone.''

Libbie's temper rose. ''I will not,'' she snapped, ''you got no right to worry us.''

Just then Annie heard her father moving about in the parlor. A nervous trembling seized her. She was beset by a wild desire to avoid seeing him, meeting him.

Libbie continued to nag, but Annie scarcely heard her, so preoccupied was she. At last she tumbled into her bed and relaxed. Out of nowhere came to her thought of little Nina, and something in her seemed to congratulate the child now on her lucky escape. ''It's all, all rotten—'' echoed hollowly in Annie's tired mind, ''all—all rotten. Living like this—a drunken father—a busy-body mother, a loud Joshua, a nagging Libbie. It's all, all rotten. . . . Oh, God, I'm tired!''

LII

Yekel had heard Annie come in and he had heard Libbie's nagging. He had sat through it undecided as to what to do. The idea had somehow taken hold of him that ultimately Libbie would go out of the house to join the others who had gone. He had sat waiting. It had never occurred to him that Annie might go to bed. When a long silence followed, and the door had not closed on Libbie, Yekel began to wonder what was happening. At last he rose and came into the room-of-all-affairs. Annie was asleep. Unprepared for such a contingency, he stood on the threshold, looking like one who has received a sudden slap in the face. He was dimly conscious of footsteps and the voices of Mira, Gussie and Joshua. When the door-knob moved he turned abruptly, entered the bedroom and threw himself on the bed just as Joshua's full-voiced "Hallo!" echoed through the rooms.

LIII

Annie was awakened by Joshua's voice from a queer dream that a cat had whisked its tail across her chest and made her breasts burn with the touch of fire.

"Well, Annie," sang out Joshua, "if you're gonne be late on my wedding day like you was

to-night by sopper, your brudderinlaw'll give you all ets komin' to you, I shall say.''

''Where were you?'' cried Mira. ''I nagged them they should leave looking at the furniture for to-morrow, my heart pulled me so about you. How does one go away without saying first? You knew you would stay away so long? I was worried to death.''

Said Joshua with his never-failing facetiousness, ''Betcha she went to see a nice young feller with rosy cheeks—''

Annie's swift glance took in Gussie's amused smile and her mother's pleased one. She felt revolted, flushed self-consciously and kept provokingly silent.

Said her mother to Joshua, ''Instead of fooling, tell her better to say really where she was. Colnedge, school, perfessors aren't worth worrying a mama for.'' And: ''My God, she didn't touch no eatings!''

''I told her she should eat, so she said 'No,' '' said Libbie, mimicking Annie, ''I asked her where she was, she told me I should mind my own business. Let her alone, ma, she's got the prouds.''

Mira turned upon Annie. ''Where were you?'' she asked, ultimatum in her tone, her arms akimbo. ''A child of mine is not to stay away till night just like that. If you had to go somewhere, you should have come home first to tell me. A mama worries.''

"And what's us, didn't *we* worry?" cried Libbie.

"And the children too," added Mira.

Said Joshua, laughing, "For Gawd's sake,—" Joshua always spoke English and deplored the fact that Gussie and Mira didn't—"give the girl a chench. One, two, three, you fall on her like soldiers with too much *vodka*. Esk her: Annie, where did you was? Where did you gone? What did you did? How you know she won't tell you? Ut, look at her face; she looks like she's bustin' to tell."

Mira dropped smiling, diffident eyes. She loved this bullying of Joshua's. It was so masculine; she had missed it in her life long enough to bend very willingly under it.

Annie, too, had come to like Joshua somewhat, but to-night she felt an utter dislike of him. He seemed to have a thousand eyes that pierced her through; he seemed to be a thousand men with a voice that clanged through the house, and the house to be a wide and open world. She craved to be alone, to sleep.

It took Gussie's additional, "Annie, answer mama," to break Annie's self-control.

"Please, won't you please let me alone?" Annie cried disconsolately. "I want to sleep."

"Listen to her, listen to her, woe is me!" cried Mira, in real distress, "actually she won't tell! From a mother she has already secrets! Colnedge

will make a fancy lady of her like the fiddle and whiskey made a fancy man of her father. Her father she is in bone and flesh."

"Oh, mama, please, please leave me alone!" All of a sudden a white rage seized Annie. She shot up straight upon her chair-bed. "If you want to know where I was, then I'll tell you. I went to see Doctor Ellis." And she sank back upon her pillow.

In the bedroom Yekel, hearing, felt a thud as of the last shovel of earth upon the grave of his spirit.

Libbie laughed a knowing "Ha! Ha!"

Joshua said, "See, didn't I told you she was bustin' to tell out only you got to ask her? And a nice young man wid rosy cheeks it was."

"So why didn't you say right away?" said the appeased Mira, lapsing into English. "Makes a secret from natting. I taut maybe you went to colnedge and the professors they said sampting, and you recited or sampting." All sorts of private conjectures Mira had, and there was something in her nature which would not tolerate being excluded from knowing all. The neighbors had her nicknamed *kucheleffel;* she was the community gossip-ladle, gathering fragments of everybody's affairs.

"*Kucheleffel*!" went bitterly through Annie's mind. She could have jumped out of the window away from all this. The next moment she

was choking with tears. She thought of her father; an understanding of his isolation came to her; her mother had tried to force his hidden self, as it were, into the open for everybody's view, and he had retreated more and more until he had found complete security in dumbness and utter aloofness. She was filled with sympathy for him, and something like envy. Her mind with a bird's suddenness of flight, flitted to Central Park, the laurel blossoms, the shimmering water, the green grass, the trees. It all seemed far, far away, a distant experience, not quite true. But more real seemed Doctor Ellis, who hadn't remembered her, Doctor Ellis to whom she had almost felt impelled to say "Don't" for something that had made chills and flushes of shame shoot through her. Real were Libbie's knowing glances, her smiles; real was her busy-body mother, the facetious Joshua, real was all ugliness. "Oh, God," Annie moaned softly, burying her head in the pillow. "I—I—want something else—" And then, "But I don't believe in God. I *don't.*" Her lips were tight set, and she felt a deep silence within herself.

LIV

After she fell asleep Annie dreamed again the queer dream about the cat whisking its tail across her chest, searing her breasts, and this time she woke up with the pain of it. But awake, she

found the pain to be in her abdomen. It was the middle of the night; everybody was asleep.

Within a minute the pain had heightened until she could not bear it. She was puzzled by it, it was such a subtle pain, so meaningful yet unfathomable. She moaned and writhed with it. And then it grew so terrible she felt danger in it. Without her volition she leaped off the bed and in her panic she thought of calling her mother. On the way to the bedroom she had an impulse to wake Gussie, but she remembered that Gussie had to rise early in the morning to go to work. She vaguely realized that to wake her mother would also rouse her father, but by this time she was in too much pain to care. The cry, "Mama!" almost escaped her, when subdued whisperings reached her from the bedroom, and stopped her short.

"With that dirt I'm through," she heard her mother's voice. "I tell you never, Yekel, never again. I've had children enough for you."

The pain shot like a knife blade through Annie. A vengeance pain, a punishment pain it was. The top of her head burned.

The sound of her father's heavy breathing reached her, as if he were inhumanly excited.

"Never," came in a louder whisper from her mother. "If you try—if you dare—I'll—I'll run out to the girls."

The bed seemed to groan mockingly.

Chills and flushes of shame made the perspiration break out over Annie.

The pain dug more sharply. It stabbed through her and seemed to open her mind. "They're—they're married!" she heard a voice in her. She had a swift comprehensive flash of understanding. She turned and fled back to her bed.

In a moment she saw her mother whip like a raggedly garbed ghost into the room and curl up at the foot of Gussie's cot.

Under the tenseness of her emotions, Annie's pain lessened. She crushed in against the pillow as if to hide from her mother's sight.

LV

In the morning, Annie was startled out of a heavy sleep by a sudden flash of something strange happening to her. Making her discovery, she was seized with a terrible fright.

"I'm dying! I'm dying!" she thought agonizingly, and called to her mother.

"It's nothing, nu, nothing. Be still about it," Mira whispered, cautiously looking about her. She planked a stiff slap upon each of the bewildered Annie's cheeks, and in a laughing whisper, added: "Now you will always have a rosy face."

A glow of pride in the girl's innocence suffused the mother's heart.

BOOK FOUR

LVI

ANNIE felt strangely weak—not at all as she had felt under the typhoid fever. The present state brought with it a sense of calm instead of unrest; and the sense of calm seemed to be born of an involuntary resignation, and the resignation to be one with something inexplicably deep.

In this condition Annie, lying on her chair-bed, was unaffected by the gross ugliness of the room-of-all-affairs and the dinning of her mother's and sisters' voices as they discussed the merits of various kinds of furniture.

"Uh, honest, Gus, are you gonne be married in two weeks?" broke in Libbie.

Married! Annie turned eyes, in which shone an unconsciously maternal light, upon Gussie. "Poor Gussie," she reflected. It was as if she, Annie, had some amazing knowledge by which Gussie had yet to come. Annie sighed.

"In two weeks, really, in two weeks," laughed Mira.

Annie saw Gussie blush and drop her eyes, and there came over her the same feeling of shame she had experienced in Doctor Ellis' office.

"Annie," said Mira, "don't you think like your mother that a bird's eye maple dresser is beautiful?" Several times now, to Annie's annoyance, Mira had brought her into the discussion this way. Annie's eyelids dropped several times in quick succession. For the world she could not look her mother in the face, and while she answered "I don't know," she marveled at Mira's lack of sensitiveness. It seemed to her that her mother ought to know by intuition what she, Annie, had witnessed in the night. But she was glad, just the same, that her mother did not know it. Once or twice, from her father's manner, it had seemed to Annie that he had guessed. Her heart had shrunk with aversion.

While Mira expatiated upon the merits of bird's eye maple, Annie closed her eyes. Through her mind, like a scroll of lighted pictures, passed all that had happened the day before—Brooklyn Bridge, the lapping water, the moss-covered buoys; towering trees, laurel blossoms, the sun like a golden altar. Then Doctor Ellis. She gave a start. Her mind was so clearly alive to the meaning of his conduct now that she wondered how she could have been so unaware only the day before. At one moment she saw her father as one and the same with Doctor Ellis, carrying Doctor Ellis' attempt farther. A fiery sense of shame burned in her so that she broke out in perspiration. This left her so weak it

seemed impossible to her that she could ever feel strong again. In her weakness that mysterious calm, springing as from a resignation abysmal and inevitable, came to her. In that mood she began to dream of Prince Answer. Little by little a feeling of such softness rose up in her that it brought the tears to her eyes. Prince Answer! She sank deeper into her chair-bed and relaxed more fully. It was as if she were abandoning herself to the protection of Prince Answer. Waves of elation passed over her that seemed to lift her farther and farther away from the room-of-all-affairs, from Doctor Ellis, from her father, her mother. . . . Only Gussie was coming along with her. And for Gussie she felt infinite love, infinite tenderness, a closeness that made her heart ache.

Joshua's stormy arrival pulled Annie up out of her dreams.

LVII

It was not because Yekel guessed Annie's knowledge of his secret that his heart held no feeling for her to-day, that he had no desire to tell her the story of Solveig's Lied. It was because he so loathed himself. He felt bereft of all manhood, knocked under by forces for which he had contempt. His bearing about the house was a pitiful mixture of timidity and boldness. Strangely he was less silent than usual, talking

in a hoarse voice. But he did not inquire into Annie's indisposition. A strange coldness and indifference was upon him. He thought of nothing dear to him, not even of his fiddle. He was anxious for dinner to be served so that he could get out of the house, away somewhere, anywhere. Joshua's arrival only heightened his eagerness to escape. Joshua annoyed Yekel terribly. Had it not been Sunday, with all bars closed, Yekel would, without a second thought, have gone off to drown his despair in whiskey.

At last dinner was served and over. Yekel made a hasty departure.

Out on the street he walked aimlessly for a while, then he turned into the Bowery. Every saloon he passed tortured him with its closed doors.

A street-car marked "Fort George" gave him an inspiration upon which he acted impulsively. Seated in the car, he thought, "The sight of green grass and open country! How good it will be!" No other thought stirred in his mind.

At Fort George he found a place near running water. He lay down on the grass beside it. The sun, near setting, hung low in a cloudless sky. Everything was defined and glorified in a rosy light. It seemed to Yekel he had never seen such an expanse of sky. He could see the woods and stretches of grass and the silvery curves of the water, far away to where the rim of the land

encroached upon the mauve and rose-tinted heavens. He was keeping thought and feeling consciously away. But at last overmastering sadness seized him. His heart grew so heavy he could feel the weight of it. The scene swam before his eyes. The sun seemed to throw off violets, roses, leaves, a multitude of them which disappeared with lightning rapidity, and were succeeded by others of different shape. He covered his face with his hands and burst into tears which ceased abruptly, leaving something tugging at his heart-strings. He felt a need to have done with life, with the struggle. The water moving smoothly onward seemed to carry his desire along with it as he gazed at its slowly changing surface. The wind, as it rippled over the grass, seemed to greet him and to invite him to the land where it was bound. Ah, yes, thought Yekel, he was tired, weary, he wanted to go. He was sick, sick of all the pain that moved under the sunshine, of the deftness and swiftness with which life murdered ideals. He felt himself for a brief moment caught up and lifted into a dusk beyond the heavens. He was himself, in a formless pre-existence, stretching out his hands lovingly toward many-colored, many-sounding life. He had been designed full of eagerness and passion; craving knowledge, experience, yearning for growth; perhaps he could have been satisfied with the whole variegated world. But life had used her iron rod

to pound him flat. He was tired. He was sick. He wanted nothing, nobody, only to drop away into sleep.

LVIII

Gussie's wedding day drew near. Under her glad exterior lay a shrinking from the future, a fear of Joshua Levine. Nor was Joshua Levine himself quite so certain of the life into which he was stepping as it appeared from his exhibitions of exuberance. To an observant person the meaning of his occasional lapses into red-faced meditation would have been clear. But nobody guessed —certainly not Mira, who was feeling a satisfaction more complete than she had ever felt before.

With her denial of herself to Yekel something new had been born in Mira. It was as if the experience had lifted her out of a negative state into that of ruler of a domain. She felt younger in her new importance. The world seemed to her complete and perfect now that she was definitely in it.

With a daughter who had just stepped into the realm of womanhood, with another soon to be married, with a husband who desired her, Mira was happy.

LIX

Joshua Levine had agreed to marry Gussie "as she stood and went," and he had lived up to

the bargain. He paid for everything, for her trousseau, for the furnishing of the home, and in a burst of generosity had even increased to fifty dollars the thirty-five intended for the wedding itself.

"Don't stint," he said to Mira, "get plenty and the best quality things to eat." He was looking a little thinner and taller these days, and an excited flush was almost constantly over his face, while his bespectacled eyes had a scarlet rim around them. Every once in a while, no matter who was present, he caught Gussie abruptly and clumsily into his arms and strained her to him while he planked wet kisses on her lips or, if she denied him these, on her face, neck, arms.

Never did this occur but a feeling of infinite sympathy went out from Annie to her sister. She felt like snatching her away from him. Unable to do so, she was tender with Gussie as she had never been before. No one in the Cohen family had been known to call another "dear" but now Annie often addressed Gussie thus, quite naturally.

One night in the dark, when Gussie was in her cot-bed and Annie in her chair-bed, Annie whispered:

"Gussie, are you happy?"

Gussie hesitated. In the dark her fatalistic shrug was hidden from Annie. Phlegmatically, in her soft voice, she answered, "Yes, why not?"

The answer was a shock to Annie, who felt in it a complete contradiction of what her intuition had been telling her,—that Gussie was shrinking fearfully from what she faced, and in advance was ashamed of the demands Joshua would make upon her once they were married. It was to encourage confidences that Annie had put the question. And now Annie felt struck dumb. She could not utter another word. She turned her back and went to sleep.

Automatically, after this, Annie's sympathy for Gussie fell away; what need had Gussie of sympathy if she were happy?

But Annie remained gentle and kind toward Gussie; she seemed to have no control over this. She found herself undertaking a hundred things to spare Gussie effort, in spite of herself. And as if she knew her enthusiasm was a kindness, she was as much excited as the others about the wedding arrangements, the trousseau, the veil, the wedding dress and all the other details connected with the event.

Yekel, watching Annie, wondered. Annie, catching his occasional glance, felt herself shrinking. She marveled with something like contempt at his indifference, and was perversely glad of the dislike for him it inspired in her. It was as if she were getting revenge for the suffering he had caused her. "How can he be so cold about his own child's marriage?" she asked herself,

and his ugly secret would rise up in her mind and bring with it a wave of dislike for him. She hated him and she was glad she hated him. It gave her a new sense of freedom, a strength. In this new freedom she went out to the rest of the family with something like hysterical buoyancy. She was almost gay at times.

LX

It was a wee before the wedding. Rabbi Fishbein, his fa written over with innumerable wrinkles, c ıe to pay his respects to the bride's family, incidentally hoping that Mira's pleasure in the son-in-law he had procured for her might find expression in a gift of money.

Said Rabbi Fishbein to Joshua with great deliberation, in the presence of all the family but Yekel, "Hearken, my son, I have brought you into a fine Jewish family. In the immediate family is a daughter soon to go to college; back in the family was a doctor; the mother's father is even a rabbi. See that you prove yourself worthy."

While the Rabbi stopped to make staccato noises in his bandanna handkerchief, Mira and Gussie wiped their eyes of tears of appreciation.

The Rabbi continued ceremoniously, "Never in the family was there the stain of ordinariness; in this family there are no shoemakers or tailors;

no.'' Again the Rabbi made staccato noises in his handkerchief. Libbie caught the glance of Annie, sitting in a far corner over a book, and they exchanged a smile.

The Rabbi added, ''Now, the father for the most part is a silent man, and it would seem he knows nothing, but it is not so.'' He paused for dramatic effect. ''You have only to watch the expression in his eyes to know that he is something much more than is apparent, a poet, a soul.'' Rabbi Fishbein had heard all this from Mira.

Annie's heart bounded. She pictured her father at that moment alone in the dark front room, staring somewhere into space. She had an impulse to fly to him, and the next moment despised herself for the impulse. He did not want her; he was no good; a drunkard, a bru— She was held up by a sparkling look of appreciation in her mother's eyes.

''A poet indeed,'' repeated Mira in a low voice, her eyes, with a reflective look in them, plunged somewhere into Rabbi Fishbein's meager breast.

''Am I mistaken?'' Annie wondered. But the next moment she saw her father's face as he hissed ''I won't,'' into hers. All was settled for her again. He did not want her. She did not want him. She remembered the night of low whisperings. She felt sick. She hated Yekel.

Said Joshua in Yiddish, with impressive slow-

ness, his eyes averted, "You have done well by me, Rabbi. I am grateful and I will try to prove myself worthy. I am getting a nice girl and coming into a nice family and, being an orphan myself and having had enough of hall bedroomlets and missuses, I will be an appreciative husband." He bent forward and shook hands with the Rabbi.

That was settled. Rabbi Fishbein coughed. In quite another voice, an easier, lighter voice, he said, turning to Gussie, "Bride, are all the arrangements for the wedding made?"

"Oh, sure," said Gussie softly, blushing.

"Of course," echoed Mira.

Annie felt impelled to rise and come forward to join the group. Rabbi Fishbein, watching her as she approached, said, "That's what I like to see, that the Americaner children don't become too stuck up to be one with the rest of the family. Are you interested in your sister's marriage?"

"Yes, I am," replied Annie, seating herself next to Gussie. "And in Joshua's, too." She smiled. Everyone else smiled.

"A bright one," said the Rabbi, eyeing Annie's comeliness. "A pretty one," he added, "very pretty."

"Don't make her conceited," giggled Libbie.

Joshua turned to Libbie, a broad smile on his face. He sat forward, slapped his knee with his hand. "You, kit, better kom here too," he said. As Libbie did not move, he rose, went and got

her, and placed her on his knee. He bit her cheek. "Sweet kit," he said, a confused embarrassment upon him.

"Better bite your own bride," said Libbie.

The Rabbi and Joshua exchanged knowing glances and smiled. The women, Annie too, dropped their eyes. Libbie slapped Joshua's cheek. "Le' me go," she cried, petulantly.

"Oh, Libbie," said Annie, "Don't be so—"

"I will *not* stay on his lap," cried Libbie angrily, struggling to free herself. She was so self-conscious she filled everyone else with self-consciousness. Joshua released her. A moment's silence followed.

Rabbi Fishbein: "Where will you hold the wedding?" He addressed no one in particular.

Annie cried eagerly in Yiddish, "Oh, Rabbi, I kept urging them to take a hall but Gussie insisted the shop she works in is good enough. Do you think it's good enough? You get married only once; don't you think it ought to be a pretty affair? A shop is an ugly place. I think it should have been a real hall, don't you? It wouldn't have cost so much." There had been long discussions on the subject and in the end Gussie had decided with Mira on the shop, the proprietor having offered the use of it free.

Rabbi Fishbein was immensely gratified with this additional show of genuine interest from the new generation. He circled the room with a con-

gratulatory glance. "You're a good girl," he said impressively. "I'm proud of your interest. A hall would have been nice; still it isn't the wedding that's important, but the life afterwards."

Annie's face clouded over with childlike perplexity. "The wedding—" she found herself formulating her objections, a thing she had not done before, "is the start into the wedded life. Why shouldn't beauty—"

She caught sight of her father, come to get a drink of water, on the threshold. Their eyes met. The words froze on her tongue. In a fraction of a second a wave of antagonism spurred her on to finish the sentence. She turned an eager face upon her auditors and, keenly conscious of her father as he lumbered about the room, continued with suppressed excitement, "Why shouldn't beauty be in the beginning, instead of ugliness? Making a match is ugly, then you follow it up with an ugly wedding. Bird's eye maple furniture is ugly. An ugly house, ugly—" She was caught up abruptly by a look of pain in Gussie's eyes. She stopped short, realizing her indiscretion. It seemed to her the words had come from her against her will. A trembling contrition held her. She laughed a hysterical laugh, jumped up from her chair, flew to Gussie's side, threw her arms about her. "I was fooling," she said gently, almost in tears. "I just wanted to fool like that. You'll have a

nice wedding with the good things mama'll make to eat, and the white table-cloths. And bird's eye maple is nice furniture. I was fooling." Another short hysterical laugh broke from her. Again she caught her father's brooding eye. It was he who had impelled her to speak those stinging words of criticism, she felt. She stiffened against him. She caught Gussie around the shoulders. "You know I was fooling, don't you?" she asked with feverish eagerness.

"Nu, we all know. Don't make such a fuss," cried Mira, annoyed, for she had not paid enough attention to what Annie had said to be much affected by it, nor had anyone else.

Annie bent to kiss Gussie and strangely, as she did so, she felt her father's face obtrude itself. She kissed Gussie with involuntary passion and then a muddle of emotions held her.

Rabbi Fishbein rose to go, just as Yekel passed to go back into the parlor. Annie suddenly became quite clear in her mind and calm.

"Nu," said Rabbi Fishbein, "may God give you all health and happiness and long life. I will see you at the wedding. And you, daughter," turning to Annie, "continue to be one with your more humble blood-relations, even if you will be an American educated lady. For this, blessings will fall upon you."

Annie stood silent and mazed. Had no one even heard her? Why had such a storm of sensi-

tiveness risen in her? Hadn't she hurt them? A strangeness came upon her; she felt lost, alone. She thought of her father and a golden bridge seemed to connect them. She could have shed bitter tears now because of their estrangement, and, the next moment, thought of him was repellent. "He's a brute," she said to herself, and turned calmly and said good-by to Rabbi Fishbein, while with an odd sense of shame she noticed Mira slipping a bill into the Rabbi's hands. Gussie's husband paid for!

LXI

A sense of futility followed Yekel about like a dark shadow. He was haunted by it. The days were hollow for him and the nights were filled with harrowing dreams. One night he dreamed he had hung Annie up by the hair at a great height, and though he heard her shrieking in an agony of pain, he did not go to her. Then she suddenly turned into a gray-haired ugly old woman who led him through an open door from where a great expanse of water, lapping against mossy buoys, was visible. The mossy buoys seemed each to have the face of Annie when she was young and lovely. As an old woman her face looked evil, smoothed over by hypocrisy. She also had excellent manners that both disgusted and ensnared Yekel. He followed her by

her invitation through the open country. She smiled up at him, and as if taking up a conversation that had been momentarily neglected, she quoted, "Unrest is sacred. It makes for high achievement. Oh, yes, sometimes it makes for miserable failure." She broke off, and walked with him silently closer to the water. When, held by a vague fear, he stopped, she smiled up at him reassuringly, and begun to quote on a new trend. "All of us are tourists upon earth," she said, "peddlers of our own peculiar wares. Some of us sell at a profit, some of us at a loss. Some of us feel at home; some of us find it a strange enough country." They were close to the water's edge. "You," she said, looking up at him with sympathy, "are sick for home?" Her sympathy seemed so genuine, Yekel forced back his suspicions. He plunged his eyes into space, away from her. He felt a mighty push. When, petrified, he glanced up at her from the murky water, a fleeting expression made Annie's face look like a witch's. "You, you false one!" he cried, and just as he was about to sink he awoke with a start to see a pale shaft of light struggling into the bedroom from the room-of-all-affairs. He could scarcely shake off the reality of the dream. It held him rigid with its vividness, and made him shudder. To awaken himself more fully, he pulled out his watch from under the pillow. It

was ten minutes to six; time to get up. He did so, haunted by a shadow of morbid misgiving.

Outside was a fog. A gray gloom hung over heaven. A wind charged without pause. It made one feel so desolate, so empty of heart.

The fog lifted a little and showed the dingy streets, a saloon still closed, Jack's Eating House, a shop for the retail of eggs and butter; undersized, sallow-faced men busily coursing one way and another; women with baskets on their arms, out for the early marketing. The next moment the fog settled down again as gray as steel and cut him off somewhat from the sordid surroundings.

Feifa Teitelbaum, in all his majestic boss-ship, already graced the shop when Yekel arrived. They exchanged a perfunctory greeting, and Yekel settled himself to work at once. Suddenly a peculiar lightness of heart came to him. It was as if he had had a divine message foretelling an end to bastings pulling, Feifa Teitelbaum's eagle eye, the snub-nosed shop, throes and longings. A marvelous peace came over Yekel. He made plans, he began to think of Gussie's wedding. He would have to wait until after the wedding to carry his plans into effect, he told himself. For the first time in his life he felt satisfied with himself for, at last, he had a definite aim toward which he was heading. This satisfaction seemed to draw him away from his longing for whiskey.

He did not even think of drink, except now and then when a voice rose in him to mock him, to tell him he would not have the courage to carry out his plans. At such times Yekel would ask himself ruefully, "Won't I?" and somewhere in the space into which he gazed figured a white subtle hand, holding a tumbler.

LXII

Mira remembered Annie's helpful responsiveness when she had imparted her plan of a matchmaker for Gussie, and her mental resolution then to reward Annie. The time had now come to put her resolution into effect. The reward she decided should be a silk dress. Annie expected only a cotton dress, no better than the lawn one that had been provided for Libbie. If Libbie took exception to this partiality, Mira decided she would appease her by saying that Annie was the older and, besides, was soon to be graduated from public school. The dress could serve for both ceremonies. She would promise Libbie a silk dress for the occasion of her graduation.

Mira bought a remnant of white China silk. The silk being so expensive, Mira decided to make the dress herself. Her secret caused her great excitement. Her excitement projected itself into all she did, making her movements swifter, and her voice shriller. In her preoccupation, she kept on repeating things. "I engaged three musi-

cians,'' she said at least one dozen times, forgetting that she had ever said it before. And, ''I baked the butter cakes; they keep fresh so long.'' Time and again she repeated, until Annie cried petulantly:

''Oh, mama, you say the same thing over and over again.''

Mira was hurt. Though she kept her secret ever so closely, she expected appreciation from Annie. ''And if I did say it before?'' she asked, in a hurt voice.

It had been agreed between her and Annie that they should go together to buy the new dress the day before the wedding, when Mira expected to have the money, as she told Annie; now she wished she had not left Annie feeling so secure on the subject. Annie's insecurity, she felt, would have led her to inquire about the dress. Mira then would have had to let the secret out and Annie, knowing, would not have had the heartlessness to show any impatience with her excited mother. But then, in a way, she did not want Annie to know yet, Mira told herself.

As a matter of fact Annie was giving her dress very little thought, for she was living under a weight of heart-sickness she could not throw off, and could not clearly define. The only thing clear was that there seemed nothing ahead. Nina was gone, her father and Doctor Ellis were nothing to her. She could not think of smaller things con-

cerning herself. She forced herself into an outward vivacity regarding Gussie's affairs, but underneath lay a feeling of purposelessness that, more than anything else, confused her. Sometimes she wished that the wedding were over so that she could strive to get herself out of her spiritual tangle. She told herself that college would bring new associates and more interesting studies, and with this she encouraged herself into a hopefulness that would last a little while. For the most part she went about feeling dissatisfied and helpless; the ugliness of the tenement streets obtruded itself more than ever upon her now; so did the wretchedness of the home and the hideous lack of privacy. "It's terrible," she kept saying to herself.

LXIII

For two days before Gussie's wedding it rained incessantly. Such a heavy gloom hung over the city, with its puddles of murky water, that even the light-hearted were depressed. Mira went about crying, "Woe is me, will it rain to-morrow too?" Gussie wrung her hands in despair. The rain really did interfere with all their plans. There were the foodstuffs and dishes to be taken from home to the shop. For this Mira had ordered a pushcart that, of course, had no top to protect from the rain the things it was to carry. Even Gussie's boss was distressed. At

last he suggested, through one of his workers who kept in constant touch with Gussie, that she should make use of a sheet of oilcloth that lay unused in the shop. "Tell her no water can go through that; let her put it on top of the things in the pushcart." But Mira sent a message of thanks and said Gussie preferred to wait until the very morning of the wedding, by which time it might clear up. After that Mira went about watching for signs of clearing up, and growing ever less moderate in her expressions of despair. Whereas before she sighed, moaned and implored the Deity, now she cried and tore her hair.

What with the excitement of Mira and Gussie, the blustering, thundering presence of Joshua and the many calls from friends and neighbors, to say nothing of the multitude of extra things that crowded the very breath out of the home, it was like bedlam. Annie felt like one thrown out upon a noisy, busy thoroughfare; she was a quivering mass of nerves. Libbie, too, was all unstrung. As for Yekel, he could scarcely stand it.

The night before the wedding, Mira was simply impossible. Her voice rose to so shrill a pitch, she had so much to say, and was so incessantly doing things, that she kept up a steady whirlwind in the house. Until late in the night she continued so, giving no one any peace.

Before morning, the craving for drink had Yekel in relentless clutches.

He was afraid to go out on the street. He was sure he could not pass a saloon without going in. How he wanted to keep away from drink this one day more! Under his fear, a great excitement surged up in him. He struggled to be calm. He asked himself, did he not remember that not long ago he had another plan? And he tried to live over again the satisfaction he had felt in himself at the time. But it did not help; the longing for drink gnawed at his vitals.

It was still raining, but a real promise of clearing up gleamed in the sky. It would clear up, Mira declared, as if to challenge the elements.

The pushcart man arrived.

Mira found everyone in the way in the bustle and turmoil that followed. She ordered each one to a different corner of the home. Becoming conscious of Yekel's bulk about, she shouted:

"What's the matter with you? Isn't it time you left long ago? What are doing here?" She simply shooed him out. "Come home early," she called after him, "don't dare be late. If we didn't need the *payde* (wages), I wouldn't let you go to work at all to-day."

Her voice—how it grated on his nerves! How it grated on his nerves!

He was terrified of the street, but what a relief to escape the voice!

It rained heavily again. Soon it increased to a drenching downpour. It was as if nature herself in a height of anguish and abandonment were casting herself prone on the earth.

Yekel looked up at the dismal sky. The memory of his brief return to a belief in God came back to him. "God! God!" hammered cynically against his brain, while within him the struggle for drink raged.

He grew tired as from physical wrestling. A sense of utter helplessness swept over him. And then he was possessed with a fury against God. He stopped short. He looked up again at the heavens. "You empty boaster." He paused. "I tell You, You are an empty boaster," he repeated, and stood heaving for breath, while hot tears scalded his cheeks. He dabbed the tears away with the palm of his hand. "If You exist," he cried, "You are hard, mean, merciless, cruel, cruel, I tell You—"

A sudden timidity, in which fear mingled, took hold of him. He resumed his walking, his head bowed low, feeling himself a condemned man. His throbbing heart seemed to shake the world with its beats.

LXIV

The day before the wedding Annie suddenly thought to remind her mother that they must go and buy her a dress. "I'll tell you the truth,"

said Mira, "I ordered a dress I know you'll like, and it won't be ready until to-morrow."

"Is it a nice dress? Why did you order it alone?" Annie was surprised but not suspicious.

"It's a dress not very different from Libbie's, only more suited to your maturer figure, and I knew you would like it. I forgot to tell you I had ordered it," said Mira.

Annie did like Libbie's dress, which was simple, but very nicely made, and she was just as well pleased to be rid of the bother of seeking another style out for herself. She said no more.

Early in the afternoon of the wedding day Mira sprang her white China silk surprise.

"A silk dress for me?" cried Annie, unbelieving.

"Only because I didn't mind," boasted Libbie.

"For you I'll get one when you gramgate from school," said Mira, her cheeks flushed and an excited sparkle in her slits of blue eyes. She turned to Annie for more expressions of surprise, to be followed by demonstrations of appreciation. Mira wanted her full share of both.

"Why, mama, it's beautiful!" gasped Annie, fingering the soft silk and the dainty lace trimming. It was a one-piece garment, neatly made with many pin tucks, a V neck and a pale pink satin sash.

"It is beautiful," agreed Mira.

"As nice as my wedding dress," ventured

Gussie softly, blushing modestly, smiling, her eyes tearful.

"Oh!" Annie was impotent. The exclamation rang like a note of ecstasy in music.

"Try it on," cried Mira and Gussie and Libbie in chorus.

A silence of suspense followed while Annie undressed and then stood while her mother redressed her in the China silk magnificence.

She made a lovely picture. The whiteness and softness of the silk brought out the endless glints of her heavy brown hair. The soft look in her blue-gray eyes, over which dark narrow eyebrows curved away with delicate subtlety, gave to her face the stamp of nobility.

"Oh, you look peachy!" cried Libbie.

"Like a regular lady," added Mira.

Back of the table hung a spotted looking-glass. In order to see herself at full length, Annie pushed the table to one side. She stood, pleasure beaming in her face, looking at herself, while the eyes of the others also were riveted on her reflection.

Suddenly Libbie cried, "Oh Ann, you're a beauty, do you know?" The realization seemed to have come to her all of a sudden, with too great force to be repressed.

A thrill of delight shot through Annie. She hung her head modestly.

"Don't be so modest," boasted Mira loudly.

"Ut, far back on my side of the family there were a few beauties, blue-eyed, dark-haired ones. It's from my side you get the beauty——" but through her mind wafted thought of the old country, and of a barmaid and Annie's father. Mira sighed.

Annie turned abruptly; her forehead ruffled. "Really, am I really beautiful, mama?" she asked.

"So you are," Mira said.

"She'll get conceited," blurted Libbie. "Once to tell her is enough."

Annie flushed, smiled, hung her head. This seemed to move Libbie, for she suddenly gave way to unprecedented demonstrativeness. She made a dash over to Annie, seized her by the hands, danced her in a circle around the room. "My, you are beautiful—my, you are beautiful!" she sang to the tune of "How fickle women are——"

Gussie and Mira laughed.

And just as Annie's heart, in spite of herself, swelled with longing that her father, too, were there to enjoy the jollity, the door opened upon him—drunk.

LXV

Despite his befuddlement, Yekel felt the shock of his condition upon his family. And from somewhere there came to him the clearness of heart

to be sorry for them, and from somewhere also came the urge to be hilarious. It was as if by being hilarious he could cover over his drunkenness and drive the pallor from their faces, and get them to talk. This silence he could not endure. They stood around like dead things, pale and silent! Why? One would think he was terribly drunk. A man had a right to take a drink once in a while.

How he wished he could say all this to them!

Instead, he sat, his pudgy hands on his pudgy knees, swaying backward and forward, conscious of his lower lip drooping to the sound of the words within. Oh, now really, they ought not to be carrying on so. One would think he was so drunk his mind was gone. Well, his mind wasn't gone; he could think perfectly clearly; never had he been able to think more clearly in his life. He could remember the time he was a mere boy—mere boy—everything—rabbi—and a whole night he had slept on top of a mountain. Why, it was all perfectly clear in his mind. Furthermore, he could sit perfectly straight on his chair, and by night he would be quite all right—sober as could be. Why, even now he could stand up straight. He tried to rise; he couldn't. He rubbed his hand over his eyes, brought it back unevenly through the air to his knee. What if he couldn't stand? Must a man stand? To sit was just as good. He wanted to say so, but

couldn't.

He looked from one to the other, and began to feel intolerably oppressed by the hostility around him. He thought of crying to scare the hostility away. But no, he wouldn't. He sat up straighter in his chair. Tears came to his eyes of their own accord. He had a little difficulty in finding his eyes. When at last he did, he wiped the tears away, thinking that by night he would surely be sober again.

Just then Libbie crossed the room, passing close by him. By a sudden impulse he bent forward and caught hold of her. At the pallor that spread over her face he haw-hawed; it was a good joke. "Shay," he said, "wassha so fray fer?" His tongue felt altogether out of place in his mouth; he was annoyed by it, and wished he could place it elsewhere. Libbie squirmed in his arms. Well, that was a pretty state of affairs! He pinched her, thinking to force her to capitulate to his embrace. Instead, Libbie shrieked, "Mama! Oh, mama!"

Mira bounded over.

"Bummer!" she hissed at Yekel, her mouth a terribly bitter stroke across her pale, pinched face. She tore Libbie away from him.

Yekel pursed his lips, looked up, winked at Mira, gave her a light slap on the wrist. "Doncha gerrangry," he said, and once more he haw-hawed. His laugh broke off like a snapped stem,

for there crowded upon him resentment against the hostility around him. He felt it was immensely unjust. It hurt him. Again the tears came to his eyes, for he felt a great need of sympathy. Again he had some difficulty finding his eyes to wipe the tears away. As of itself a silly smile then broke over his face. Following a sudden impulse, he glanced up flirtatiously at Mira. But Mira did not see his effort, for she was walking off, in abject misery muttering, "To-day! Just to-day! God in heaven, what should we do?" Yekel was left feeling cheated of the grand opportunity to make peace. It seemed to him that if Mira had only seen his flirtatious look all would have ended well, and he could have promised her that by night he would be sober. He ruffled his forehead; he scratched his head; he looked as if to say, "There must be something to do. What can it be?"

His eyes fell upon Annie. A sense of great spiritual closeness to her shot through him and seemed to sweep away the pressure from the top of his head. He felt extraordinarily light; a crystal clearness was over his mind. All his senses seemed to quicken suddenly. All the facts of his drunken career, compact and mercilessly vivid, grew furiously alive in his memory. It seemed to him that all the sensations, physical and spiritual, that he had ever known were crowding now upon him in one moment. All the elusive emo-

tions and impressions that haunted the dark recesses of his mind became electrified with life. He felt terribly alive and terribly sober. He felt an overpowering need to convince Annie that he was sober and alive. He caught her eye.

With his forefinger he beckoned her to come to him, throwing a surreptitious glance about the room, glad to find no one else was noticing him.

A cold sweat broke over Annie. Under a wave of revulsion she felt her whole being grow numb. She made no sign of obeying his summons.

Yekel beckoned again. Annie looked away.

An angry flush rose to Yekel's face. He was not going to be disobeyed. "I called you. You heard me?" he cried, hiccoughing, enunciating clearly, his anger as if completely obliterating his drunkenness.

Annie made no answer. Yekel purpled with rage. He forgot everybody and everything but his purpose. He rose. "Hear me?" he thundered, balancing himself with one hand on his chair. "Hear me?" he repeated, his loud voice tearing through the air.

And as Annie still did not answer, Yekel's fist crashed down upon the table. The dishes rattled. The new pitcher fell to the floor and broke to pieces.

An ominous pause followed.

Then Mira, like a madwoman, swept across the room and hissed in his face, her fists clenched

with rage, "I'll break your head to pieces, you good for nothing bum, you inconsiderate brute, you swine, you heartless bull!"

The words pressed upon Annie's heart with a sudden unutterable pain. An ominous light came into her eyes.

Yekel took a saucer and deliberately threw it to the floor, shattering it to bits.

Mira held off a short moment, then, rage stripping her of all reason, she flung herself forward and struck Yekel in the face.

With a cry of anguish Annie leaped forward and thrust herself between her father and mother. She stood panting, glaring down into the depths of her mother's eyes, her mind in a whirl; she was like one suddenly crazed. "How dare you! How dare you!" she cried.

Yekel's heart, beating in a drunken fog, felt like a leaden weight. He hung his head as his eyes caught Annie's look of ineffable grief and compassion.

Libbie shot forward. "How dare *you?*" she yelled in Annie's face. "The silk dress you forgot already?" She turned and addressed herself bitterly to the room-of-all-affairs. "Everything mama does for her, and she sticks up for him! For him she sticks up—the bum, when on his own child's wedding day he gets drunk! He shames us before the whole world and she sticks up for him!"

A terrible moment of silence followed, during which Yekel was seized with a fear of catastrophe. He had an over-mastering wish to make peace. "Sha——" he begged of everyone in general, bending raggedly forward, clumsily striking the air with his hand. "Sha——"

Mira, spent, heart-broken at the sight of Gussie's grief, took her daughter's arm. "Come," she said, "come, we'll go do our work for the wedding. We'll do the work. We'll have the wedding. Let him go to hell and sleep. He cannot disgrace us; he only disgraces himself. And she—" Mira turned her eyes on Annie, "so long as I live I will not forgive her this show of favor to her no good drunken father. I am through with her." Followed by Gussie and Libbie she dashed out of the house to go to the shop and do what was possible before the workers quit for the day.

* * * * *

They looked into each other's eyes—the father and the love-child. Clear, penetrating were hers; his were blood-shot and blurred.

There was nothing more against which to protect her father, and Annie's protectiveness fell together like a bursted balloon. She stood regarding him silently, thoughtfully. In her ears sounded her mother's piteous, hurt voice. In her mind lingered a picture of the white China silk

dress. A feeling of tender gratitude toward her mother for her goodness and sacrifice welled up in Annie's heart. With tender pity she recollected her mother's hurt the day they had deserted her to accompany this drunkard to Seward Park. She gazed appraisingly into her father's eyes. "A drunkard he is, a drunkard, nothing, nothing more," she thought with bitter finality. Every effort she had made to help him loomed up a farce in the light of the present. He was beyond help, he was no good, no good through and through. Her heart ached dully. She saw her father more clearly, it seemed to her, than ever before: all selfishness, all brutishness, a bad, bad man he was. All her hopes, all her ambitions now, as if once for all, one by one, laid down their arms and fell dead one on top of the other at her feet. In a spurt of new spirit she stepped resolutely over this heap of dead things. With a definiteness she had never before felt, she now knew she was through and, being through, she felt a surge of rage.

"Drunkard!" she dragged out, piercing her father's eyes with her own, "Drunkard!" Then she turned and fled.

LXVI

Yekel stood staring at the closed door. "Drunkard!" Something palpable and heavy seemed

to fall a thousand times upon his head, making a thunderous buzzing in his ears, stunning him. Abruptly the rumble ceased; his mind cleared. "Drunkard," he repeated slowly. So she had called him drunkard at last. His love-child. He could scarcely believe it. Yet it was so. There was nothing else to do but believe it. He felt terribly sober now, and terribly weary. He dragged himself over to the table at the other end of the room. One hand upon the table, he stood taut. Slowly he raised his other hand to his breast as if to still the heaving sounds. His throat contracted in short, sharp, painful spasms. In a moment he broke, and collapsed. He sank into a chair and began to sob. Then abruptly his sobbing ceased. He fell asleep. In an hour he awoke, feeling lighter and steadier. He remembered Annie. He went out in search of her.

LXVII

The shop in which Gussie had worked and in which she was to celebrate her wedding was a big loft of a sweat shop building on Willet Street. It was an ugly place, with its rough and worn wooden floor, its mouldy, musty walls and ceiling, and its bespattered, broken window panes. To its natural ugliness was added the ugliness of age worn sewing machines, stools, rolls of

thread, boxes and boxes of buttons, and stacks of boys' knee-pants.

The proprietor, a pompous but good-hearted man, rapidly working his way up to a summer house in Arverne-by-the-Sea, greeted his former worker, her mother and little sister warmly. To seem even more friendly, he resorted to Yiddish.

"We will push the machines against the walls," he said, "all the other stuff, too, so it will be out of the way. The tables"—there were three of them, long affairs used for cutting out the pants —"we can put one alongside the other in the middle of the room. You will find this a comfortable place."

Mira, her face a mass of wrinkles, and feeling timid under the strain of her worry, tried to smile. "It was so very kind of you to let us have the place for nothing," she said ingratiatingly. "We appreciate it a great deal."

"Oh, not at all," retorted the boss, "Gussie worked many years for me. She was loyal and I am glad to do her the good turn, only too glad."

"Have the workers gone home already?" asked Gussie timidly.

"Yes," answered the boss, "it is slack anyway. I thought I would empty the place early for you so you could fix it up to your heart's content."

"Did the foodstuffs and dishes come all right?" asked Mira.

"Oh, yes, yes. I quite forgot. It's all in the

rear. You'll find it. To the right you'll find a gas-range to do all the heating up you require.'' He was taking his hat preparatory to leaving, quite forgetting he had included himself for the task of moving the machines to one side and the tables to the center.

''I'll see you later,'' he said, for he had been invited to the wedding, and intended to come.

''Good-by, good-by,'' said Mira, Gussie echoing her.

''Thank you a thousand times,'' faltered Gussie.

''A thousand times,'' Mira echoed.

The boss left.

Gussie looked at Mira. Mira looked at Gussie. Libbie, her lips parted, her nostrils quivering, her eyes blinking, looked from one to the other. Then, as one person, Gussie and Mira sat down on chairs and began to cry. Libbie dropped down on a stack of boys' knee-pants, and she, too, began to cry.

This lasted fully ten minutes. Then Mira, blowing her nose and wiping her eyes, rose.

''Come, Gussele, it's getting late. We'll fix things up and go back home. You must have your hair curled yet and fixed at the hair-dresser's and it will take time to go back home and dress and come back.'' She sighed. Gussie sighed too. Gussie rose. Together they began shoving the machines to one side, pushing the tables to

the center, arranging chairs around them. Libbie was given orders to cover the tables with the table-cloths. Then came the setting of the tables.

Three large bowls of fruit were set one in the middle and one at each end of each of the three tables; grated horseradish followed; then followed bottles of wine, and bottles of whiskey, glasses and, finally, the dishes. There were all sorts and patterns of dishes, borrowed from all the neighbors who had any to lend. Mira herself arranged the plates holding the many kinds of cake she had baked.

After the work was done all three withdrew to the door and stood contemplating the effect. But for the reflection of the surrounding gloom, they felt the tables would look really nice. Both Gussie and Mira sighed light regret as they glanced at each other. Neither said anything.

Libbie mumbled, "It's good. Annie'll—" The rest froze on her tongue. She had forgotten for the moment how Annie stood in her mother's heart.

They were retracing their steps, and with each step Gussie's and Mira's sense of disaster heightened. "God mine," Mira wailed at last, "I can't believe that actually for months he went around sober and to-day he is drunk!"

Gussie hung her head in misery. "It's my dark luck," she said, scarcely audibly.

Cried Mira, "But think how lucky you are that

you have a young man who will not hold it against you!''

''A *Yiddisher glick,*'' (Jewish luck) sighed Gussie.

The rest of the way they walked in silence, except for Libbie's sniffling, coughing and occasional low humming.

After visiting the hair-dresser's where Gussie and Mira had their hair marcel-waved, they went home, to the tune of Libbie's ecstatic:

''It's not to reconize you at all! It's not to reconize you at all. You look peachy, both!''

LXVIII

They found Annie at home, but not Yekel. Annie had wandered about the streets and had finally come back home, knowing there was nothing else to do.

Though no one mentioned the matter, each was thinking of Yekel. Would he be home in time for the wedding? Would his drunkenness have worn off by then? Yekel had a way of shedding his intoxication suddenly and unexpectedly.

''Thank God,'' whispered Gussie, ''it's customary for the groom to stay away from the bride on the day of the wedding. At least he isn't here to witness our misery.''

''Thank God, indeed,'' sighed Mira.

LXIX

Yekel stumbled through the streets, blindly expecting at every turn to encounter his daughter, more and more disappointed that he did not. He had thought out clearly a method of winning back her love. Oh, she loved him. Of that he was sure now; otherwise why had she taken his part with such a show of passion? It was involuntary action that counted, he told himself, and what she had said later was as nothing. The drunken soul of Yekel chuckled in the knowledge of his victory. In spite of that loafer of a Doctor Ellis, she really and truly loved her father! That visit she paid Doctor Ellis? Maybe she had gone because her father had hissed "I won't!" in her face. Oh, no, he was not too drunk to bring about an understanding; he felt fully capable of explaining. He would go into the explanation just as soon as he met her. In fact, he would also tell her the story of Solveig's Lied; every bit of it, from beginning to end. What was that he had thought of the other day? Life was not worth the struggle? Why, his love-child was the prize of humanity that God, in his bounty, had granted him, Yekel the drunkard! Beautiful she was, as beautiful as the heavens. The lovely girl! Yekel's nerves tingled with a new delight. He began to call Annie names to himself, names

sweet and tender, and to look eagerly around for her. Where was she? Surely by this time she ought to have crossed his path. His disappointment grew, and in the midst of it he began again to think of how he would win her over to him. In case she was reluctant to stop and talk to him, this was how he would arrest her attention: he would offer to buy her a pickle. She liked pickles. He remembered her as a very little girl when, to stop her tears, her mother used to hold out the bribe of a pickle. Instead of Mira it was he who was holding out the delicacy to the little tearful baby now; he saw her toddling over to him, tears arrested, a half-smile on her face. She was close to his knee, reaching up her tiny pink hands. He held out the pickle. She seized it, with a gasp. He saw her tears magically disappear, and gladness, like sunshine, break out over her face. His love-child!

He dragged along, smiling unconsciously, calling Annie by names tender and sweet, sending messages to her along with the wind that had swept the rain out of the day.

But Annie did not appear.

Yekel's glances became anxious. At one moment he looked up and mechanically read "Allen Street" on a street lamp. At the same moment he heard an arresting sound, "Tse! Tse!" He glanced around. Behind sheer lace curtains that veiled a window of a ground floor flat, a

woman, her bosom exposed, sat smiling. When she caught Yekel's eye she winked. Yekel knew her trade. He frowned, while a momentary feeling of desire shot through him. He dropped his eyes and walked on. He fell to thinking about the hideousness of the business that was going on behind lace curtain on Allen Street. It struck him of a sudden that his children attended Allen Street School. Young ones, in all their innocence, came upon this vileness daily, lived surrounded by it, he reflected sorrowfully. Life for a moment became for Yekel a weight too heavy to carry. He felt himself give way under it, and under a sense of guilt. How remiss he had been in his fatherhood! And now it seemed to him as if nothing he could say, nothing he could do, nothing he could plan for the future could ever make up for the past. He felt utterly defeated. He didn't care to meet Annie any more. He had nothing to say to her. She had called him drunkard, and worse was in her mind. She was right, she was right, her father was bad—no father, no man.

A woman, smiling alluringly, lurched against his thigh. Yekel heard himself called "good looking," "a prince."

For a moment he felt strangely unrelated to the whole universe. In that moment he followed the woman into her house.

LXX

The three musicians were the first to arrive at the wedding.

"We'll sit by the door," softly spoke the violinist, a little, anaemic looking young man with dreamy brown eyes.

"That goes without saying," answered the burly banjoist.

The accordion player, for all the world appearing to open and fold like the instrument he played, smiled out of his narrow gray eyes. This little violinist and that hulk of a banjoist were always quarreling, he thought as he went off to look up a deep plate for the collection of money gifts from the guests.

When he returned with the plate and was putting it on a chair close to the door, the violinist ventured:

"I hope the guests are a little generous. That red-headed haggler pulled down one dollar on the price. She was like a leech. I couldn't shake her off."

"You can never shake off a bad bargain," grunted the banjoist. "Plenty good ones you shake off without even trying."

At this all three smiled. They were good friends, the violinist and the banjoist, for all their bickering.

"Say, fellers, you both," commanded the ban-

joist next, "when you see what looks like ready cash, play up loud and lively."

He received nodding acquiescence.

All three sat down. They began to tune their instruments.

Soon Mira and her daughters arrived.

Considerable fluttering ensued. Mira flew here, Gussie there.

The musicians continued to tune up.

At last the guests began to arrive. They came in small groups, young men, young women, girls, boys, wrinkled little old women, bent, bearded men, behind whose faint smiles lurked the shadows of much sighing and the brooding dimness of old-world mysticism.

No one missed Yekel. In fact Yekel was considered, by all who knew the Cohen family and its history, as a sort of superfluity, a kind of pest of which Mira could not rid herself. No one asked for him; no one cared. If ever Mira was glad of the indifference which, thanks to her, was her husband's portion among the friends of the family, she was glad now. But she herself kept throwing frequent eager glances toward the door, not because she was so anxious to see her husband come in, as to glimpse his condition should he put in an appearance. By this time she was determined that if he seemed in a mood to cause a disturbance she would have Libbie lead him home. The fact that no one had missed him had given Mira cour-

age.

Joshua was the first to ask about Yekel. Flustered and stiff in the full dress suit he had hired for the occasion, Joshua looked like the jack of diamonds in a pack of cards. He brought over Isaac Schaefer, his business partner, to meet the Cohen family.

"Sh-sh!" whispered Mira, when he asked for Yekel.

Joshua had no kinder feelings for his father-in-law than his father-in-law had for him. In fact, to Joshua, Yekel Cohen was a hulk of flesh designed for no purpose whatsoever.

"Did he break a leg?" whispered Joshua.

Fortunately, as Mira felt, Isaac Schaefer at that moment raised his voice in a manner not to be ignored, so that her answer was not imperative.

"My Gawd, ets a pruddy bride you're gettin', like a picture, so help me Gawd!" cried Isaac Schaefer.

After laughing, Mira went off to mingle with the guests.

The musicians struck up a gay tune. Couples danced. Others clapped hands. It was merry, so merry.

Mira continued to dart frequent glances at the door. Annie, standing at the door, met her mother's glance. Annie's eyes were dim and sorrowful, for she was thinking of Yekel. She was

wondering where he was, bitterly regretting her onslaught. At the unexpected encounter of her mother's eyes, a look of alarm came into her face; she gave a downward startled glance and then hid away in a corner where she knew she could not be seen but from where she could see everyone who came in.

But Yekel did not come.

All the guests had long since arrived. The wedding ceremony had been performed. Dancers had danced their gayest. It was time for supper.

In spite of herself, Mira kept postponing the seating of the guests in the faint hope that Yekel would yet come, his intoxication gone.

But the hour came when postponement was no longer possible. Mira made a hasty, half-hearted allotment of seats.

Annie's place fell at the middle of the table farthest away from the door. At the head of the same table sat the flushed bride and sweating groom, Rabbi Fishbein and Mira. Opposite Annie sat Libbie. Next to Libbie sat a young cousin of even poorer extraction than the Cohens who, the moment she was seated, placed a sheet of newspaper under the table upon which she planned, by her mother's instructions to drop pieces of food, whenever the opportunity presented itself, to be taken home to the rest of the family.

At the chief table also sat the toastmaster, Isaac Schaefer.

Isaac Schaefer was not God's masterpiece. Physically he might remind one of a good chunk of beef; he was short, round, red, beefy looking. In his very eyes was his spirit reflected. They were eyes whose blueness told you that life was a meal, a bed, a bank account, and that all who thought otherwise were fools.

Nudged by Joshua, he rose leisurely and swept a long, narrow look around the tables. There was a twinkle in his eyes. He stood a moment with his head slightly bent, his eyes raised, saying nothing. Then he cleared his throat.

Then, "Ladies and gents, *kochkes* and *gens*," he began.

"Speak Yiddish," whispered the flustered Joshua.

Rabbi Fishbein made staccato noises in his big bandanna handkerchief. A slight pause followed.

Isaac Schaefer proceeded in Yiddish. "My dear friends, it is a great pleasure to be here assembled with you at the wedding of my very dear friend, Joshua Levine. Not alone my friend is he, but my partner in business and I have had occasion enough to learn that he is an A number one gentleman, worthy of even so pretty a maiden as the bride of the evening, Gussie Cohen." Isaac spoke slowly, with deliberation. He paused for want of thought. "Yes," he went on, "it is a pleasure, I repeat, to be here to-night, and ex-

pecially with my friend, Joshua Levine. Now the bride, Gussie Cohen, is an exceptionally pretty and nice and respectable and modest young lady and together they will make a fine set.'' He stopped for the titters like an orator acknowledging applause.

There was a sudden clinking of glasses. A few guests were pouring themselves wine. Isaac waited for quiet. He continued:

''They say matches are made in heaven, but I understand the estimable Rabbi Fishbein whom we fortunately have with us here to-night made this match.''

Again titters.

''And, well now,'' continued Isaac, dropping his chin, ruffling his brow, raising his eyes, ''as the time is flying, you will listen to telegrams received this evening from the most important people of the United States, on this most important event in the United States.'' While he broke open a mock telegram, he said in an undertone, but perfectly audibly, ''Nothing more important than the world should become peopled with little Joshuas.''

Merry laughter sounded.

Annie, hearing, felt her mind halt in amazement. She seemed to coil up within herself.

''Here,'' cried Isaac Schaefer in a raised voice, ''is a telegram from the President of the United States.'' He paused, while sly, knowing sparks

leaped out of his eyes. "'Happiness and joys, next year a pair of boys!'" he thundered.

Hilarious laughter. The guests fairly rocked in their seats.

Isaac's eyes caused something to rise in Annie's soul of which she felt curiously ashamed. The feeling that rose up in her was so keen she was afraid it could be seen in her face. In her excitement, hardly conscious of what she was doing, she poured herself out a small glass of whiskey and drank it slowly. There came to her a flash of understanding of her father's love of the stuff. "What a wonderful taste it has!" she thought. She had never tasted whiskey before; Mira kept it out of the house as if it were poison.

In a moment, a curious elation seized Annie.

"The next telegram," thundered Isaac Schaefer, "is from the Honorable Mayor." Again that knowing, sly look came into his eyes. "The Mayor says," he bellowed, "Life is an empty dream in a single bed."

A little self-consciously the audience laughed, but laugh it did.

Annie glanced timidly around the room. It was the fact that Gussie, too, was laughing that made her hand shoot out across the table, seize the neck of the whiskey bottle, pour herself out another glass.

The people, the room, seemed to melt away mist-like from sight, as Annie gazed at Isaac

Schaefer whose mouth opened and shut, and opened and shut.

Every now and then Annie glanced at the door. Dim in her consciousness lay the thought of a father who must come. Sensations possessed her, contradictory sensations each keenly felt. She wanted to laugh, she wanted to cry. She wanted to fly through the air, she wanted to sink through the floor, she wanted to be silent, she wanted to shout. There were slight murmurous sounds of gladness in her heart. The room was not so dim as it had been, the table-cloth shone up into her eyes beautifully, her mother's cakes carried an air of prosperity.

Even in her gladness Annie's glances at the door were troubled.

Isaac's bellowing continued. His twinkling eyes made a curious excitement rise in Annie, an excitement vivid and intimate. All of a sudden a fairy-tale hung about in the air. Prince Answer—Doctor Ellis—Papa—they were all mixed up in her mind.

LXXI

When Yekel found himself inside the Allen Street flat he discovered that the woman with him held his hat in her hand. He could not exactly remember whether she had taken it off his head on the street and whether he had followed her in on that account. At any rate, he knew now

that she was short and heavy-limbed, with a great bulk of bust. Her appearance repelled him somewhat. Yet, as she coquetted around him, he felt sparks of desire shoot up in him.

How it happened he could not understand, but in a moment he was sitting in a soft chair, she on his lap, and he was biting into the warm flesh of her lips. Waves of ecstatic feeling went through him at the words of murmured flattery he heard. She was attracted by his fine appearance. So seldom one met with a real man. And such intelligent eyes! A philosopher he must be, a dreamer, a poet, a prophet.

It seemed to Yekel that the hunger of all his life was being satisfied now, that he was seeing himself for the first time in a mirror that reflected him as the man he really was.

He lay on her breast, with no motion in him except at intervals a gasping sob. It seemed to him as if his spirit had passed away. In his brain was a melodious murmuring of the name, "Regina."

And then somehow he found himself out in the street again. He remembered a burning kiss on his lips, round hard arms, and a bulk of bust. Thought of it all caused him to accelerate his steps, the farther to be removed from the scene. Disgust, horror assailed him. He felt an amazing hypocrisy in himself. He had permitted himself to consider this woman as one with Regina—she in

whom all the beauty and graceful motion of Nature were concentrated and harmoniously blended! His self-loathing was almost sickness.

He looked at his watch; it was eleven o'clock. He must present himself at Gussie's wedding. Probably they were still dancing. He would steal in, circle around, make himself evident. He would take a few looks at Annie and then he would steal away.

As he walked to the place of the wedding he sent prayers up to heaven like the whisperings of leaves. Might his Annie grow up to distinctive womanhood. Might she, oh God, find the gift in life that had passed her father by. "And if I ever denied you, oh God, if I offended you, forgive," Yekel pleaded mournfully, "and don't visit my sin upon her.

"Keep her good, keep her pure, keep her clean, help her, oh God, to a strength her father has not had, and without which no man is a man."

Feeling more pure in soul himself than he had ever felt before, Yekel reached Gussie's wedding place.

The halls were dimly lit, so that he had to grope his way up to the fifth story from where voices and the clatter of dishes floated down to him.

When finally he was all the way up, a terrible timidity fell upon him. He lingered a few mo-

ments outside the door before he gained the courage to go in.

LXXII

The whiskey hummed in Annie's brain. She felt curiously loose and relaxed. Wrinkled, sallow faces became rosy and beautiful. The sweatshop, with the paper peeling off the damp walls, was Central Park with laurel blossoms, shimmering water and tall trees, bathed in a sad, soft spring twilight.

Annie's eyes darted longing looks at the door.

"Say Ann," sounded Libbie's voice, "better don't get drunk."

The little cousin giggled.

Laughter all around.

A bellowing voice.

Rabbi Fishbein's staccato blowing.

Then the scene became shadowed. Faint murmurous sounds reached Annie. What appeared to be her own hand was feeding her hot soup, chicken, cake, whiskey, whiskey. How wonderful that drink!

Laughter seemed to be breaking out and bursting inside her like bubbles. Now and then she heard the laughter above herself.

And now there was a dinning clatter of dishes, and an incessant buzzing of voices.

Emotions of all sorts clutched at Annie with strange eagerness and then let her go. Some-

thing drew her eyes constantly to the door, and her hand to her glass. The liquor had a wierd fascination. In the fog of her brain she was planning always, forever to have whiskey at her beck and call, for it made you want nothing more. It made you care free, entirely happy. It made all reality dissolve into nothing. It gave birth to something in you complete and great. It was everything she had ever been seeking for. She would have it always, even——

And in the act of pouring herself a fourth glass, while her heavy eyes labored to look over at the door, she beheld him—her father. He appeared in a fantastic mist, on a floating cloud, in a golden armor, throwing off green glints.

She rose upon unsteady feet. There were others round and about the room. No one noticed her especially, not even Libbie, who was talking and giggling with her little cousin.

Bubbles upon bubbles of laughter broke in Annie. She laughed. She laughed, while she floated up to the cloud where *he* stood—and while together, she in his arms, they soared upward, onward, nearer and nearer the sun. Music was afloat. Violins, banjos, accordions were pouring forth a grand exciting anthem.

"We—we are married," rang in her brain as she whirled round and round in the air.

Yekel was hidden from general view by the musicians and others standing around, but after

awhile his eyes and Annie's met. Yekel felt himself go white. And when he saw her staggering on her feet, drunken laughter shining in her eyes, something seemed to snap within his soul.

What—what calamity was this!

Yekel's heart was pierced with anguish. She was at his side. He took her swaying young form in his arms and led her out of sight of the others.

They were out in the dimly lighted vestibule, alone. Her head fell on his breast. She was muttering, "We are married."

Her father's eyes, as he and she sailed upward and onward to the sun, sent out a call to her to which she felt her whole being go out in answer. Then the call came not alone from his eyes, but from his voice, from his hands that touched her, from his arms that held her, from his breast upon which lay her head.

"We—we are married," she faltered again, a tender radiance lighting her face. Then, drawing her mouth up to his ear, she added secretly, "Whis—whiskey's fine—I'm going to—to dr—drink it always—always now—You—you too!" Her voice squeaked; she gave a drunken chuckle.

Yekel felt keen swords cut and turn in his bleeding flesh. He felt as if all the world's wickedness had been avenged upon him. He clenched his fists with hatred against the abhorrent gift of life.

With a strange eagerness he clutched Annie and strained her to his breast. Then he let her sink slowly to the floor.

For Annie the cloud in which she was sailing seemed suddenly to burst and to drop her somewhere where it was hard and cold. She saw her father turn and run down what looked like stairs. A sense of desertion seized her, and a crying need for him.

"Papa—papa—" reached Yekel. How infinitely tender it sounded in his blackness, how mysterious—how sorrowful. But he did not turn back. He ran on, feeling upon himself a terrible weight of guilt and shame.

Annie sat up. Her eyes were luminous in the dim light. She flung her arms out into the air with a quick passionate gesture. Her whole frame quivered with passion. "Pa—pa—papa!" she wailed piteously and then, in a stupor, sank to the floor again.

LXXIII

To Brooklyn Bridge Yekel flew. He sat on a bench, his head bowed, feeling tortured and destroyed, although he could feel his temples beat hot with life. Sitting still his body seemed to him heavy as a ton weight, and full of pain. He could have wished to fade away gradually, to sink into everlasting sleep. People passing now and then looked like phantoms, voices seemed to mock

the purpose of all being. His eyes dimmed with tears. He was feeling crushed under a weight of guilt. To his girl he had handed down his sin! At times he could not believe it. At other times the thought seemed to rush through the flesh of him, and tear him to pieces, each time leaving his faculties utterly unable to cope with it.

It was a moonless night. More rain hung threateningly in the sky.

Yekel yawned with the fatigue of his body and the pain of his spirit. He sat forward in his seat and stared down at the murky water. In the dim light it seemed a black sheet lazily stirring to no purpose. He was struck by the weird aspect of it.

Gazing down upon it, Yekel felt his will asleep within him. He sat and sat. Scenes of his life, when he had sat playing his fiddle, when he had tended Annie, when he had stood in Seward Park listening to music, passed as in a dream before him. It all seemed far, far away, as if it had happened centuries ago. He was tired, very tired. He started suddenly and told himself that he could leap over the railing in one bound, and that what he craved would come to him—rest, peace.

Still he sat.

He began to think on the fate of man, how long he was in the making and then how like a breath he was turned into nothing. "Dead, he is no more than a dead fly, a little dust, gone, forgotten

forever.'' How cruel it seemed. ''Why,'' he asked himself, ''could a God wish to create such a fate?'' He paused. ''Really,'' he thought, ''in anger one denies God; in a softer mood one admits Him, but even in the very softest mood one must ask what manner of being can this unseen, unknown be against whom all revolt is so futile?'' He felt too tired to go on thinking.

He got up and stood idly staring for a long time, conscious of the languid lapping of the water below. ''My—my poor little girl.'' Over and over again the words pierced his heart.

A boat passing up the river blew its warning to another boat. Yekel was startled by the sound, which had for him the quality of a long wonder note. ''It, too, wonders,'' he said to himself, hardly conscious of any significance in what he said. He stood irresolute, waiting for the boat to let itself be heard again.

He looked down at himself. ''To-morrow,'' he said, ''I could, if I wanted, be a dead man, a heavy hulk of flesh empty of grief. They would lift me and carry me tenderly and speak about me in reverential whispers.'' A smile, cynical and wistful, broke over his face. ''I am no good,'' he thought. Then he repeated it aloud. ''I am no good.''

He remained motionless, staring down into the water, feeling a lure rise up from it. The lure grew stronger and stronger. Anger awoke in

Yekel against the water, strong and vindictive anger, in which was mingled an uneasy feeling. He bent over and spat into the river and, having done so, looked down as if to see whether the water had not been obliterated.

The water was still there. He sighed resignation. His anger left him. He said to himself, as if suspicious of his courage, "A man must be resolute. He should make up his mind to do a thing, and then do it." He leaned forward and muttered as if reasoning with another person, "It would only mean jumping up swiftly from this seat, over the low railing—"

But he remained still, and his heart began to beat so rapidly he felt his nostrils close up and leave him breathless. He opened his mouth. He rose and walked a few paces back and forth. He stopped and picked up a piece of newspaper, skimmed it with his eyes, threw it down on the ground again. He continued his pacing. Before him stood Annie, drunk, reeling as she had done when he had appeared at the door. "Is it really so that she is drunk?" How unbelievable it seemed. Little Annie! Little—

He sank down on the bench with a cry of anguish, then started up again.

"Die?" a voice cried in his ears. "Die? You cannot die!" The voice paused. "Out of the land of Canaan, out of the house of bondage," he heard.

A great peace came over Yekel's soul. Slowly a sense of wonder filled him. He stood stark still. Then with slow, even steps he walked to the stone railing that bordered the stone walk many feet above the water.

"Should I jump in?" he asked himself.

"Out of the land of Canaan, out of the house of bondage—out of the house in which you had to live you must lead your child, your Annie," sang resonant voices in his ears.

"Out of the house of bondage in which I had to live I must lead her," he said slowly, deliberately.

A new gladness began to coil itself round and round in Yekel's self. He began to feel benevolent. Plans formulated in his mind. He would take Annie away to a country, to some place where there were trees and grass, where she could fill her lungs with perfume-laden air and feed her soul upon the sight of birds dancing among the flowers. He himself would work as a farm hand. Why not? Had he not muscle and sinew? Now then, if Mira could not make a living with the bands, he would send her a regular allowance out of his wages—yes, a regular allowance. Mira should know she was married to a man, little as it had seemed so heretofore. Gussie's wages would no longer be forthcoming; he would be the provider.

Yekel's heart swelled with his determination.

Suddenly he felt himself become dizzy. He flung his hand before his eyes. Slowly, as if out of the bowels of the earth, there rose a white supple hand, holding a tumbler. The whiskey in it sparkled like a golden sun. Closer to Yekel's mouth it drew—closer still. . . . Deep blue eyes looked their softest down into Yekel's. . . .

"Regina!"

It was a cry of anguish.

Yekel plunged his hands out into space and battled as if with all the great world and its hidden forces for his freedom.

Then, "I can't! I can't!" rose up out of him between low sobs as he sank limp against the stone wall, losing his balance.

A great sense of danger swept over Yekel, then left him abruptly. Dimly, he was conscious of a swift flight through the air, then of water—water—water——

LXXIV

Isaac Schaefer cried, "And now, ladies and gents, we are through with the telegrams, with the good eats, and it's time again for the dentsing. Now you will have more strength for dentsing." He turned to the three men. "Here, musicians," he cried, "there—now—play!" He clapped his hands vigorously. "A *Kazatske*—" (a jig).

Gay music burst forth and mingled with a

deafening shuffling of chairs and tables pushed back into corners.

The noise roused Annie. She sat up and listened. Then she remembered. A beast that had been as if asleep in her bosom stretched itself and suddenly bounded to its feet. A sharp fear stabbed at her heart.

She rose from the cold floor and stumbled toward the door, muttering, "My father—" She was aquiver with apprehension, founded on a vague memory. "My father, my father," she kept on repeating.

She advanced a little into the room.

She shivered as the musicians' tune broke out louder, gayer. A man was approaching her. She fixed longing, hungry eyes upon him . . . Was it her father?

It was Isaac Schaefer, with outstretched arms. "Ut *here* you are," he cried. "I want a dents wid de college sister-in-law off my best friend and partner. I want a dents—"

Laughing, he encircled Annie's waist and drew her into the room. He began to whirl her around.

She wanted to resist him, but did not. Instead she took care to step in time with him. Her body grew light, lighter, light as down. Gayer and gayer grew the music—and she, too, was gay.

She wanted to laugh. . . . But her father, where was he?

She was whirled about so fast she could not

distinguish one person from another. . . . As soon as the dance was over she could make a thorough search for him. . . .

The music came to a stop with a bang.

Isaac Schaefer's arms relaxed. Now she was standing still, with her hands before her eyes, feeling herself going around and around and around. How funny!

She took her hands from her eyes, looked up at Isaac Schaefer, and then about her, fixing her attention finally upon a bottle and a glass standing on a window ledge.

She started, shrank, decided, and went resolutely toward the window. Isaac Schaefer, thinking she was going to sit down, followed her, anxious to have the next dance. He kept spilling bits of laughter and compliments on the way. "Fine dentser. . . ." "Like a bird . . . light. . . ."

At last the window ledge. . . .

As if preparing to resist Isaac Schaefer's disapproval, Annie turned and faced him folding her arms, staring at him with a half defiant, half questioning look. Isaac stood waiting for a sign of her intention.

When he saw her bend and lift the whiskey bottle, he had a sudden flash of realization that she had already drunk too much. "Uh, lady, lady—" he said cajolingly, and attempted to draw the bottle out of her hands.

Annie folded her arms again, bottle in one hand, glass in the other, and hugging her folded arms, began to laugh silently, swaying her body lightly as she laughed.

How absurd it all was—worry about papa—papa—Isaac Schaefer—mama—weddings. It was really all a mania—how very plain everything was now—a mania—crazy—

She laughed and laughed, silently, swaying her body lightly.

But Isaac Schaefer was not entering into her mood. He still looked as if he would like to snatch the bottle and glass away from her. An inspiration! Now she would win him over. . .

She turned her back in a flash, and in a flash she had the glass filled. She turned again. An inviting, subtle smile was in her eyes. She drew closer to Isaac and raised the glass to his lips.

"Drink," she said, "drink. It will do you good!"

A moment's pause. Then Isaac Schaefer snatched the bottle and glass away from her.

The musicians struck up again.

"Come on now," commanded Isaac.

Anger like a sudden flame leaped up in Annie. She raised a hand to strike him. As suddenly her anger died; her hand fell slack. Quivering apprehension, founded on a vague memory, returned to her. She drew her hand slowly through her hair. She glanced as if unknowingly at the

bottle and glass in Isaac's hands. "My—my father," she murmured dolefully.

Isaac Schaefer put down the bottle and glass.

"Come on," he said, "dents wid me—" and he whirled her away.

THE END

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